

# THE PRIEST IN UNION WITH CHRIST

BY

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## INTRODUCTION

Two years ago I wrote a short work entitled *De sanctificatione Sacerdotum secundum exigentias nostri temporis* (Turin, Marietti, 1946), which has recently appeared in a new edition. The central theme of that work was the urgent need of a deeper faith both amongst the faithful to enable them to stand firm against the principal errors of the day—especially against the materialist and atheistic spirit of the communist creed—and also amongst the clergy so that they would be able to communicate this gift to all Christians. In developing that theme I discussed the duty which falls on every priest—not excepting secular priests—of tending towards Christian perfection, and I stressed the exalted nature of this state of perfection as revealed in the eight beatitudes, which are concrete expressions of that perfection, and in the supreme precept of love of God and one's neighbour. Special emphasis was also given to the fact that this precept commands the perfection of charity not as something to be put into practice at once but as the end towards which all the faithful must be striving, each one according to his own particular calling in life, either as a married person or as a priest or as a religious—whether in sacred orders or not. But if the faithful in general in their state of life have this duty of constantly tending towards a greater love of God and their neighbour and towards the full perfection of charity which will be found in Heaven, how much greater is the obligation of priests to make a similar effort in order to be true lights of the world and the salt of the earth.

In this new work *The Priest in Union with Christ* the spiritual life of a priest and his special priestly functions are considered with a view to underlining the following three points.

In the first place, the priest of to-day, no less than his counterpart of yesterday, must never forget for one moment the words spoken by Christ: “Make it your first care to find the kingdom of God, and his approval, and all these things (i.e. food and clothing) shall be yours without the asking” (Matt. vi, 33). In other words, the end of all our endeavours must not be a mere earthly happiness for the human race freed from every form of

oppression, but eternal life—the Kingdom of God. True, it is the final thing to be obtained, but it must always be the foremost of all our intents and purposes. A certain amount of temporal well-being will help us along the road towards eternal life but it must always be subordinate to the final end.

In times past the priests who served in the Synagogue made the mistake of looking forward to a Messiahship entirely of this world, as though the Messias intended to found an earthly kingdom with Israel as the ruling power. At the present time a similar danger seems to exist, a danger which has been noticed by many bishops in different parts of the world. Men and women are eagerly awaiting another earthly “messianic kingdom” in which the workers are to be completely free. This is a very different situation from that which existed some years ago when little notice was taken of the apostolate amongst the working class. Although this apostolate is now under way it is in danger of being inspired by a purely naturalist spirit, a mistake already made by Lamennais, who imperceptibly lost sight of the true mission of the Church—the guiding of men towards eternal life—and began to preach more and more in the vein that the true goal of the Church was the temporal happiness of mankind freed from the yoke of oppression. That is well explained by Fr. A. Fonck in the *Dictionnaire de Théologie catholique*, under the heading “Lamennais”, cols. 2478, 2493 seq. Signs of his error were already evident even before his apostasy, but afterwards became still more apparent in his book *Les Paroles d'un croyant*, a naturalist's imitation of the Gospel written under the influence of the teaching of J. J. Rousseau and the romantics. Towards the end of his life Lamennais denied all distinction between the order of grace and the order of nature; from the very outset he had always maintained that the only form of faith necessary for salvation was the acceptance of the universal consent or general reason of mankind, which he thought had originated from some primitive revelation.

Recently many bishops have expressed their fear of a similar danger arising amongst those who are anxious to “christianize” Marxist doctrine in their desire to remedy present-day evils. In so doing they are laying too much store by the temporal happiness of the people and neglecting their eternal welfare, which is their true final end and ought to be their dominant

intention, something they earnestly desire, not merely the object of an ineffective wish. Above all must it be true of a priest that he constantly renews this primary intent of striving for the final end, if he wants his activity to be supernatural and fruitful. On the efficacy of that intention will depend all his other intents, decisions, and actions. That is why Christ said: “Make it your first care to find the kingdom of God, and his approval, and all these things shall be yours without the asking”; that is to say, food, clothing, and a certain amount of temporal well-being for mankind but in due proportion to their final end. But he never promised to relieve man of the daily carrying of his cross. The Catholic priest must remember this if he desires to attain to a genuine union with Christ our high priest and victim, and to make his apostolate supernatural and fruitful.

The second point I want to emphasize in the course of this work is that Christ the Saviour and high priest of mankind came on earth for the special purpose of revealing God's love for his creatures who stood in need of redemption. He came “so that they may have life, and have it more abundantly”, to put within their grasp the perfect life of eternity as the full flowering of sanctifying grace, the seed of glory. This abundant life is far and away superior to any earthly happiness and begins for the faithful follower of Christ even here amidst the difficulties of his present life in the following way (although the communist is violently opposed to such an idea): “Blessed are the poor in spirit, the patient, those who mourn; blessed are the merciful, the clean of heart, the peace-makers and even those who suffer persecution in the cause of right.” These have received already an abundance of life as the prelude to eternal life.

In order to counteract the errors of Protestantism and Jansenism the priest should be continually reminding his people that “God does not command impossibilities, but by his commands he exhorts you both to do what you can and to pray for what you are not able to do, and he helps you to have the necessary power”, which the Council of Trent (Denzinger 804) quotes from St. Augustine. All who accept this teaching and put it into practice will receive abundant life: that must be the constant burden of the priest's preaching.

And thirdly, I want to point out that Christ desires to live in us as his members—especially in his priests—as a means of

showing God's love for men in their need of salvation. Therefore the priest should never forget to live day in and day out and at every moment of the day in an ever-deepening union with Christ, whether he is celebrating Mass, hearing confessions, directing souls, or preaching, so that in all his work he is another Christ, the minister of Christ. Never should he be a mere functionary of the Church, since Christ himself has that ardent desire to live in him for his own sanctification and for the salvation of souls.

This book has therefore been divided on the basis of those three ideas, and is taken from my course of spiritual theology, the principal parts of which have been published in French under the title *Traité de théologie ascétique et mystique: Les trois âges de la vie intérieure*, Paris, 2 vols., 641 pp. and 866 pp.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This work has been translated into English by Sister M. Timothea Doyle, O.P. *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, Herder, St. Louis, 1949.

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In all his activities the priest must be another Christ closely united to Christ himself

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*Part One*

## THE DIGNITY OF CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD AND OF OURS

The fundamental theme of this work is the dignity of the priesthood. And thus the opening chapters are devoted to a doctrinal study of the two parts of this theme: the dignity of Christ's priesthood, and the dignity of our priesthood, which is simply a sharing in that of Christ.

Not only the nature but also the purpose of each priesthood must be discussed, and it will then be evident that both have the same purpose: the manifestation of God's goodness and love towards men in their need for salvation, so that they may have life and have it more abundantly.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST OUR SAVIOUR

**C**f. the Epistle to the Hebrews; the commentaries of the Fathers and of St. Thomas on this Epistle; the Summa, IIIa, q. 22.

It is clearly revealed that Christ our Saviour is a priest—the high priest of the New Law—and that his priesthood remains for ever. “We can claim a great high priest, and one who has passed right up through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God” (Heb. iv, 14). “There he stands, eternally, a priest” (Heb. vii, 3). “Christ lives on still to make intercession on our behalf” (Heb. vii, 25). See also the Council of Ephesus (Denz. 122) and the Council of Trent (Denz. 938).

#### *Christ as man is a priest*

The special office of a priest is to be a mediator between God and men by giving divine gifts to man—namely, God’s teaching and grace (the downward movement in mediation)—and by offering to God the prayers and sacrifice of man (the upward movement in mediation). This office is especially appropriate to Christ as man since his humanity is inferior to the divine nature and yet at the same time personally or hypostatically united to the Word, and he has also received the fulness of grace in his capacity as head of the Church. Hence it is already evident that his priesthood has as its purpose the manifestation of God’s love for man. And so St. Thomas, when he asks whether it is fitting for Christ to be a priest (Summa, IIIa, q. 22, a. 1), quotes the words of St. Peter in his second Epistle (i, 4): “Through him God has bestowed on us high and treasured promises; you are to share the divine nature.” This was the way in which Christ brought divine gifts to man—by giving grace which is the seed of glory or of eternal life. In the passage just quoted, St. Thomas also refers to the Epistle to the Colossians (i, 19): “It was God’s good pleasure to let all completeness dwell in him, and through him to win back all things.”

Therefore Christ as man is priest and mediator and in this respect inferior to God; but it should be borne in mind that even as man he is by no means inferior to the angels, not because of his nature but because of the hypostatic union and his fulness of grace and glory.

*Why is Christ's priesthood everlasting?*

St. Thomas gives three reasons (IIIa, q. 22, a. 5). First, because of his everlasting consecration through the hypostatic union, from which results a completeness of grace and glory that could never be lost. Secondly, because his priesthood has never been superseded by any other, since he intercedes unceasingly on our behalf. Thirdly, because of the consummation of his sacrifice—namely, the unending union of redeemed man with God in the Beatific Vision. This is the eternal treasure conferred on man by the Saviour's sacrifice—everlasting life—and that is why Christ is said to have taken his place “as our high priest, to win us blessings that still lie in the future” (Heb. ix, 11).

But Christ is not only a priest: he is also a victim by submitting to death and offering himself to God the Father on our behalf. This is of faith, as is evident both from Scripture—“He gave himself up on our behalf, a sacrifice breathing out fragrance as he offered it to God” (Ephes. v, 2)—and from the Council of Trent (Denz. 938): “On the altar of the cross he once offered himself through death to God the Father that he might obtain their eternal redemption.” And Christ remains the principal priest and victim in the Mass.<sup>1</sup>

What constitutes the nature of Christ's priesthood? The grace of the hypostatic union according to the opinion of an increasing number of theologians, and this for three reasons. In the first place, it was in virtue of the hypostatic union that Christ was able to offer a sacrifice of infinite worth, which would make satisfaction for sin and merit for us grace and everlasting life. Secondly, Christ as man is a priest in virtue of his anointing by God, and his original anointing came from the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Council of Trent (Denz. 940): “For the victim (in the sacrifice of Calvary and in the sacrifice of the Mass) is one and the same: he who is now offering through the ministry of priests is the same person who then offered himself on the cross, only the manner of offering is different,” in so far as the immolation is no longer accompanied by the shedding of blood, neither is it meritorious, but applies to us the merits of the Passion.

grace of union. Thirdly, it is the same grace in Christ which is responsible for his own sanctification and for the sanctification of others. But the grace which is primarily responsible for Christ's sanctification is the grace of union. Therefore it is the grace of union which is primarily responsible for Christ's sanctification of others.

*Christ is both priest and victim*

It is important to insist on the fact that Christ was and remains for ever both priest and victim, for it gives us a clear and practical expression of the dignity of his priesthood. Cf. IIIa, q. 22, a. 2. St. Paul writes in his Epistle to the Ephesians v, 2: “Order your lives in charity, upon the model of that charity which Christ shewed to us, when he gave himself up on our behalf, a sacrifice breathing out fragrance as he offered it to God.” We find the same truth defined by the Council of Trent (Denz. 938, 939, 940) when considering Christ's institution of the sacrifice of the Mass and of the priesthood of the New Law.

Why is it that Christ was and will always continue to be both priest and victim?

Simply because there was no other victim befitting his priesthood. He was the most perfect victim possible, possessing an infinite value, just as the offering of the sacrifice of the cross also possessed an infinite value because of the person of the Word. He was a victim in three different ways: *a victim for sin*, in order to obtain the forgiveness of sin; *a victim for peace*, in order to preserve grace; and *a victim of a burnt-sacrifice*, in order to effect a perfect union of redeemed man with God in the Beatific Vision. The texts which St. Thomas quotes from the Epistle to the Hebrews are explicit on all these points (IIIa, q. 22, a. 2).

Christ certainly did not put himself to death but willingly submitted to the blows of his executioners, although he could have rendered them impotent as he had done previously in the Garden of Gethsemane, when his enemies fell to the ground. On an earlier occasion he had said (John x, 18): “Nobody can rob me of my life; I lay it down of my own accord.”

The fire which consumed the victim was, according to St. Thomas, the fire of infinite love coming down from heaven.

The visible sign of the Father's acceptance of the victim which had been offered to him was the glorious Resurrection and Ascension of Christ.

Notice how the voluntary death of Christ differs from the death of a martyr, since it was a sacrifice in the strict sense of the word. The martyrs submitted to their death willingly, but once the death-blow had been delivered it was no longer within their power to lay down their life or take it up again. Christ on the other hand could have miraculously prevented his death occurring under the fatal blows of his executioners, and this he could have desired if his Father had not given him a command to die on our behalf. Furthermore not all the martyrs were priests, so the sacrifice they made of their life was not a sacrifice in the strict sense of the word since it was not offered by a priest.

Therefore Christ the high priest offered himself as a victim, first of all without the shedding of blood at the Last Supper under the appearances of bread and wine, and then by pouring out his blood on the cross. It is important to remember, however, that even if the Last Supper had never taken place, Christ's voluntary death on the cross would have been a complete sacrifice and not merely a part of a sacrifice—although Fr. de la Taille disagrees with the majority of theologians on this point. For at the time of the crucifixion there was not only a bloody immolation but also an offering, an offering which was not entirely internal but also externally expressed in the words: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit"—"It is achieved."

The effect of the sacrifice was atonement for sin: "Our weakness, and it was he who carried the weight of it, our miseries, and it was he who bore them" (*Isaias liii, 4*).

#### *The perfection of Christ's priesthood*

St. Augustine (*De Trinitate* bk. iv, c. 14), St. Albert the Great (*De Eucharistia* dist. v, c. 3; ed. Borgnet 1899, vol. 38, p. 387), and St. Thomas (IIIa, q. 48, a. 3; q. 22, a. 1 and a. 4) are all agreed that it is impossible to conceive of any priesthood being more perfect than that of Christ.

The proof of this assertion rests on the definition of priesthood—together with the fact that although Christ's habitual grace

could be increased the grace of union could not. The argument can be put briefly as follows—

The degree of excellence belonging to any priesthood depends on the intimacy of union, first between the priest and God; secondly, between the priest and the victim possessing the greater purity and value and which is more completely destroyed; and thirdly, between the priest and the people on whose behalf the sacrifice is offered.

This principle follows naturally from the definition of a priest—the mediator between God and man for the offering of sacrifice.

In the first place, a priest must be closely united to God by holiness of life in order to make up for shortcomings in the worship, petition, reparation, and thanksgiving of the faithful.

Secondly, a priesthood possesses a greater degree of excellence if the victim offered in sacrifice possesses greater purity and value in order to express the sinlessness of a contrite heart, and if the victim is more completely destroyed in order to express the total consecration of oneself to God.<sup>1</sup> Also, the perfection of a priesthood is measured by the union existing between priest and victim, since the external offering and destruction of the victim are intended as signs of an internal offering and immolation of the priest himself. In the words of Psalm L, 18: "If thou hadst a mind for (external) sacrifice, sacrifice I would have given thee, but thou takest no pleasure in burnt-offerings; the sacrifice God loves is a broken spirit; a heart that is humbled and contrite thou, O God, wilt never disdain." That was the reason for God's refusal of the purely external sacrifice offered by Cain.

Thirdly, the excellence of a priesthood depends on the intimacy of union between priest and people, and also on the number of people with whom the priest is closely united, because the priest in his capacity as man's mediator for offering sacrifice to God has to unite together all the worship, petition, reparation, and thanksgiving of the people into a single raising of his mind to God; that is, so to speak, the soul of the people's prayer. Consequently a priest in closer union with a greater number of people is a sign of a more perfect priesthood, since the sacrifice

<sup>1</sup> Considering the victim alone, the most perfect of all the sacrifices of the Old Testament was Abraham's offering of his dearly loved son, who as the type of Christ offered himself heroically without any resistance in a spirit of prayer and love of God.

he offers gives increased honour to God and its effect is more widespread. Think of St. John Vianney celebrating Mass for his own people and for the large number of pilgrims.

This principle can easily be applied to Christ's priesthood, revealing at once that its splendour could not possibly be surpassed by any other.

In the first place, Christ as priest is not only more holy than all other priests but he is holiness itself, since he is the incarnate Word of God. Also, his holiness as man springs from the uncreated grace of union with the Word, which sanctifies his humanity. In this respect Christ's formal and fundamental holiness is not acquired but innate, is not accidental but substantial, is not created but uncreated. His human priestly actions are theandric since they are the actions of the divine person of the Word, and so possess of their very nature an infinite value—originally for obtaining merit and making satisfaction on our behalf, now for giving adoration and thanks. Note that the grace which belongs to him as head of the Church is not sufficient for giving his actions that infinite value, since it is created habitual grace.

Moreover, Christ is holy by reason of the abundance of his habitual grace and created charity, although it must always be remembered that by the absolute power of God this created habitual grace and charity in Christ could have been increased, whereas the grace of the hypostatic union was as perfect as it could be. Incidentally, this confirms what has been said already, that it is the grace of union which constitutes the nature of Christ's priesthood.

Christ also possessed the chief ministerial power (*potestas excellentiae*) of instituting the sacraments and a priesthood which would endure for all time.<sup>1</sup> He is the source of all priestly power.

Therefore, because of his holiness or permanent union with God, Christ's priesthood could not be surpassed, since it would be impossible to create any greater grace than the grace of union—although it is within God's absolute power to create a greater habitual grace and charity than that present in the most holy soul of Christ.

In the second place, Christ's priesthood excels all others by

<sup>1</sup> St. Thomas, IIIa, q. 64, a. 4; q. 50, a. 4, ad 3.

reason of his union with the perfect victim which he offered. We have already stated that Christ is both priest and victim; no other victim would have been worthy of his priesthood. And it was not merely his body which was offered as the victim but also his soul which was ready to die with sorrow. The correspondence between the external and internal sacrifice could not have been more perfect, neither would it have been possible for the victim to possess greater purity or value or to undergo greater destruction. So it was that the sacrifice of Calvary was a perfect holocaust, verifying the words of St. John the Baptist: "Look, this is the Lamb of God; look, this is he who takes away the sins of the world" (John i, 29).

And finally, Christ's priesthood is the most perfect possible because of his union with all Christians—in fact, with men of all generations and of all races who have belonged and must belong to his mystical body, since he died for all men without exception.

The sacrifice of the cross was universal both in time and in place, and from Christ's side the union between himself and the people could not have been more intimate. Cf. St. Paul's teaching on the mystical body of Christ, I Cor. xii, 27; Ephes. iv, 25; v, 26. The moral influence which Christ exercised over his mystical body by merit and satisfaction while he was here on earth is now continued in heaven by his prayer of intercession: "He lives on still to make intercession on our behalf" (cf. IIIa, q. 21 and IIa IIae, q. 83, a. 11). Moreover he is the physical instrumental cause of all the grace we receive (IIIa, q. 62, a. 5) and of every act of transubstantiation which he is actually willing.

Therefore, from whatever aspect we view Christ's priesthood—the union between Christ and God, or between Christ and the victim, or between Christ and the people for whom the sacrifice was offered—its supreme perfection is evident. It is impossible to conceive of any closer union between priest and God; and this confirms the view that the nature of Christ's priesthood is constituted not by his habitual grace and the grace which is his as head of the Church—for this together with his charity could be surpassed in virtue of God's absolute power (IIIa, q. 7, a. 12, ad. 2; q. 10, a. 4, ad. 3)—but by the uncreated grace of union which is identical with the Person of

the Word as terminating, possessing, and sanctifying the humanity of Christ (IIIa, q. 6, a. 6), and which is also the foundation of the infinite value of the sacrifice of Calvary and, therefore, of the sacrifice of the Mass.

In brief, the reasons why we find it impossible to think of any priesthood being more perfect than that of Christ are the following—

First, there cannot be a closer union between the priest and God than the hypostatic union.

Secondly, no priest can be more closely united to the victim of his sacrifice than Christ was, since he himself was both priest and victim. Not only was his body offered as the victim but also his soul which was ready to die with sorrow.

Thirdly, there cannot exist a more intimate union between priest and people, nor can the number of people be surpassed, since Christ is the head of all men and his sacrifice was offered for everyone without exception.

There now remains one further question to be discussed concerning the priesthood of Christ, and that is its relationship to the Masses which are being offered at present throughout the world.

#### *Christ's priesthood and the Mass*

Does the priesthood of Christ exercise here and now an actual influence on every Mass, so that Christ himself offers each Mass not merely virtually but also actually?

This question has been well treated by the theologians of Salamanca in their work *De Eucharistia* (disp. xiii, dub. iii, §1), and I myself have already considered it at length in the first volume of my treatise *De Eucharistia*, 1942, pp. 290–300.

Scotus, the Nominalists, and Vasquez maintain that Christ is the principal offerer at Mass in virtue of the fact that it was he who instituted this sacrifice and issued the command that it should be offered in his name. But he does not actually offer the sacrifice here and now, since this would seem to entail the presence in Christ of several acts of internal offering.

On the other hand, the majority of theologians—especially the Thomist school—are of the opinion that Christ does actually offer all the Masses celebrated each day of the year throughout the world, although this does not imply several

acts of interior offering; there is but one act in his soul which endures for ever. Such is the opinion of Cajetan, John of St. Thomas, the theological school of Salamanca, Gonet, Suarez, Bellarmine, Bérulle, Condren, Bossuet, Olier, Thomas-sin; in more recent years, Lepin, Grimal, Hervé, Michel, Petazzi, S. J.

The following are the arguments which they bring forward to support their view—

(1) This opinion is implied in the words of the Council of Trent (Denz. 940): “For the victim is one and the same: he who is *now* offering through the ministry of priests is the same person who then offered himself on the cross, only the manner of offering is different.” In other words, Christ is actually here and now the principal offerer. However, since Christ is no longer a wayfarer on earth the sacrifice is neither blood-stained nor painful nor meritorious; the Mass applies to our souls the past merits and satisfaction of Christ.

(2) Pius XI writes in his encyclical *Quas Primas* (Denz. 2195): “Christ the priest offered himself as a victim for sin and eternally offers himself.” The same view is to be found in the encyclical of Pius XII *Mediator Dei et hominum*, 30 November, 1947, for when speaking of Christ as the principal offerer he writes: “Similarly he offers himself daily on our altars for our redemption so that we may be saved from eternal condemnation and numbered in the flock of his chosen ones.” In the Mass he does not acquire new merit but applies the merit already gained through the sacrifice of Calvary.

(3) The fundamental theological argument is based partly on Scripture and partly on Tradition.

“Christ lives on still to make intercession on our behalf” (Heb. vii, 25, and Rom. viii, 34). It is also the common teaching of the Fathers that Christ is the principal offerer of every Mass. Now is this office of principal priest something which he *once* exercised in the past when he instituted the Mass? But he is “a priest for ever, in the line of Melchisedech” and “lives on still to make intercession on our behalf”. Therefore he is actually exercising this office at the present moment, for it is one which he can never lay aside.

So Christ as the principal priest of the sacrifice of the Mass actually wills and offers that sacrifice. How well this illustrates

the eminent dignity of our sacrifice, not only because of the victim offered but also because of the principal offerer and his theandric action of reparative worship, intercession, and thanksgiving.

I have already shown in the first volume of my work *De Eucharistia*, p. 294, that this was the opinion of the Fathers.

(4) According to St. Thomas (IIIa, q. 62, a. 5) and the majority of theologians the humanity of Christ is an instrumental cause of all supernatural effects, an instrument always united to the divinity, conscious and free. In other words, Christ as man wills to co-operate physically here and now in the production of these supernatural effects. But amongst these effects is each and every act of transubstantiation. Therefore, Christ as man wills each one of these acts in virtue of an act of his will made while on earth, when through the Beatific Vision and his infused knowledge he foresaw and willed every single Mass as an application of the merits of Calvary (IIIa, q. 10, a. 2; q. 11, a. 1).

So this interior offering continues unceasingly in Christ in his state of glory; it is never renewed or multiplied. This offering—so far as its effects are concerned—is subordinate to the offering of the sacrifice of the cross, since the Mass is simply the application of that sacrifice. Therefore Christ could truly say on the cross: "It is achieved", precisely because the Mass only applies the merits already gained by the Passion.

A confirmatory argument can be derived from the fact that Christ certainly wills to give himself in Holy Communion to all the faithful who receive him. A fortiori, he must actually will to offer himself to God the Father in accordance with the four ends of sacrifice. The consecration is of greater importance than the communion, since the essence of the sacrifice is obviously more important than its participation by the faithful. So Christ must will both actually.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cardinal de Bérulle writes in his book *Vie de Jésus*, c. 26: "This first voluntary act of offering made by Jesus is not a transitory act like ours, but one which is permanent as depending on the nature and state of eternity. It is an everlasting act of the will which has never ceased day or night, which has never been disturbed or interrupted by any other act, but has always remained actual in his soul. Just as in that soul there is a perpetual life-giving movement, so also this interior and spiritual act of offering has been (and is) everlasting in the mind and heart of Jesus."

This act of self-offering endures in Christ in the same way as the Beatific Vision

This view would seem to be certain and has been confirmed in the recent encyclical of Pius XII, *Mediator Dei et hominum*.

It is a truth which has far-reaching consequences for the priest celebrating Mass. It means that he must strive to attain to a still closer and present union with Christ, who is actually offering the Mass in the most perfect manner possible by his theandric act of infinite value, accompanied by the highest degree of contemplation, fervent love, adoration, and piety. The celebrant will thus share more intimately in the supreme priesthood of Christ.

The priest will then be led on to recall that Christ is not only the offerer of the Mass but also its victim, that he once endured most painful sufferings and now offers to his Father the sufferings of his mystical body—our own pains and sufferings—so that they may possess greater value for the saving of souls.

If the priest happens to be somewhat distracted by any irreverence in those around him at the moment of consecration, Christ himself is certainly not distracted. His soul united to the divine person of the Word sees and wills this present act of consecration, sees and wills its value and its efficacy and the spread of its influence even to the souls in Purgatory. All this is seen intuitively by Christ and actually willed by him.

While on earth he had already foreseen all this in his capacity as judge of the living and the dead (cf. St. Thomas, IIIa, q. 10, a. 2). With even greater reason must he now enjoy the same knowledge through the Beatific Vision, which is not subject to time but to eternity in which it shares, and while in Heaven he continues the same act of will. So at this ever-present moment of unchanging eternity Christ sees and wills in his sacred soul every Mass and the influence which it exercises on the whole world—in the mission-fields, in Purgatory, and even in Heaven in so far as it is the Mass which leads us towards eternal life and gives supreme glory to God.

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and the love and the worship which accompanies that vision; it is measured not by time but by the eternity in which it shares.

Cf. Bossuet *Élévations sur les mystères*, 13th week, 7th Elevation: "From the moment that Jesus (entering this world) began this wonderful act (of self-offering), he has never discontinued it; from the time of his infancy and even from the time when he lay in his mother's womb he has remained in his state of victim completely resigned to the divine commands. . . . Let us, therefore, imitate the example of Jesus Christ in his attitude of victim and abandon ourselves without reserve to the will of God."

This is a truth which we ought to make known to the laity in order to encourage them to fix their attention on the principal priest, since the celebrant at the altar is only the minister of Christ and not his successor. They would come to appreciate better the infinite value of the Mass, which originates from the victim and the principal offerer. They would also find it easier to understand how the sacrifice of the Mass and the sacrifice of Calvary are essentially the same sacrifice—the same victim and the same principal offerer—differing only in the manner of offering. On Calvary there was suffering, shedding of blood, and merit; now the sacrifice is bloodless and sacramental. No longer is it painful and meritorious but confers on us of its very nature (*ex opere operato*) the satisfaction and merit of the Passion and produces in our souls abundant grace, dependent on our present dispositions. On many occasions the saints while assisting at Mass have seen Christ himself in the place of the celebrant, making the actual offering of himself for the glory of his Father and the saving of souls.

And so it is that the excellence of Christ's priesthood stands clearly revealed; it is obviously impossible to conceive of one more perfect.

## CHAPTER TWO

### OUR PRIESTHOOD

**T**HE sublime character of our priesthood is evident both from the manner of its institution and from the sacrament of Holy Orders and its effects. We shall now consider each of these points in turn, paying particular attention to the exalted nature of the purpose of the effects resulting from our ordination.

#### *The institution of our priesthood*

The Council of Trent declares (Denz. 938) that at the same time as Christ instituted the Blessed Eucharist he also instituted the priesthood of the New Law: "Do this for a commemoration of me" (Luke xxii, 19; 1 Cor. xi, 24).

By these words spoken after the consecration of the bread and wine Jesus Christ ordained the Apostles priests for offering the sacrifice of the Eucharist. Later on, after his Resurrection, he also gave them the power of forgiving sin when he breathed upon them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit; when you forgive men's sins, they are forgiven, when you hold them bound, they are held bound" (John xx, 22). On an earlier occasion at the beginning of his public life he had called them to follow him: "Come and follow me; I will make you into fishers of men" (Mark i, 18). "It was not you that chose me, it was I that chose you" (John xv, 16).

Now the priesthood, no less than the sacrifice of the New Law, must endure for all time in order to promote the salvation of men and women of all generations. Therefore the Apostles chose out and ordained other ministers by an external and visible rite—the laying on of hands—so that they might be set apart from the rest of the faithful. To these men alone belonged the office of ruling the Church, of dispensing the mysteries of God, and of offering gifts and sacrifices: cf. Acts vi, 6; xiii, 3; xiv, 22; xx, 28; 1 Tim. iv, 14; 2 Tim. i, 6; 1 Cor. iv, 1; Heb. v, 1. The office of mediator which the priest exercises in offering sacrifice to God and in conferring divine gifts upon the people presupposes that he has been called by God, because

"his vocation comes from God, as Aaron's did; nobody can take on himself such a privilege as this" (Heb. v, 4).

#### *Priestly ordination and its effects*

The Church has defined that Ordination or Holy Orders is a sacrament in the strict sense of the word, instituted by Christ and conferring grace in virtue of its sacramental character. It is further defined that "the hierarchy instituted by divine ordinance consists of bishops, priests, and ministers" (Council of Trent; Denz. 966). Nevertheless many theologians—for instance, Billuart and other Thomists—maintain that the Episcopate is not a sacrament distinct from the priesthood but simply extends the priestly character to the power of ordaining and confirming, a power which is in no way superior to that of consecrating the Eucharist—the supreme sacrament and sacrifice. This reveals at once the eminent dignity possessed by every priest of the New Law, for neither the Bishops nor the Pope himself have any greater power for the consecration of the Eucharist, although they do possess this additional power of ordaining, confirming, consecrating churches and chalices, etc.

It is also of faith that priestly ordination imprints on the soul an indelible character and confers a special sacramental grace (Denz. 964, 959). We must pause a moment to consider the sublime purpose of this character and sacramental grace.

The character is an intimate and permanent possession of the soul which enables a man to perform the actions of a priest validly; so it is commonly understood as the active power of Holy Orders to consecrate the Eucharist validly and to absolve the faithful validly from sins committed since Baptism. Cf. Council of Trent, Denz. 960.

But what is the purpose of the sacramental grace of Holy Orders (Denz. 959)? It is easier to answer this question with certainty than to decide what it is that constitutes its nature. The grace is given that the priest may perform the duties of his state not merely validly but also holily, and that this spirit of holiness—which is intended to characterize all his work—may develop in unison with his growth in grace and charity demanded by the supreme commandment (cf. Denz. 960). The reason is obvious. God never confers a power on any man without at the same time giving him the necessary means for

the *worthy* exercise of that power. And the prayers in the Pontifical make it evident that this is the purpose of the sacramental grace of Holy Orders. Hence it follows that this grace is an even more precious effect than the character of the sacrament. Cf. IIIa, q. 62, in the introduction to the question.

Taking all these definitions and assertions together it is clear that the Catholic Church regards our priesthood as invested with a noble dignity. We shall return to this point later on, but let us note at once how superior is the Catholic Church's teaching on this matter to the erroneous views of others.

Apart from certain ritualists, most Protestants deny the very existence of the sacrament of Holy Orders, contending that all the faithful are priests by virtue of their Baptism and only need a public mandate in order to exercise their priestly office. The Modernists in their turn assert that the priesthood is nothing more than an institution of the Church.

It is perfectly true that the facts we have been discussing were not revealed in any theoretical form but in the practice followed in the administering of the sacraments. Now the complex nature of priestly ordination—no less than that of Baptism—can be described in a number of assertions according as one considers the matter, the form, the minister, the subject, or the effects. Even from the practice of not repeating ordination, much information can be gathered about the effects of this sacrament, especially about the indelible character.

So it is that the character of Holy Orders is different from the character of Baptism and of Confirmation, because these are directed towards different acts. Cf. IIIa, q. 63, a. 5.

Furthermore, while the Baptismal character is a power of receiving validly the other sacraments, the character of Confirmation and of Holy Orders is an *active* power (q. 63, a. 3); and whereas the character of Confirmation fits a man for the defence of his faith, the character of Holy Orders gives a man the power to consecrate and absolve validly. Christ himself did not receive this special character since he was a priest in virtue of the eternal grace of the hypostatic union.

Though the sacramental character is a permanent possession of the soul—even in Hell—the sacramental grace is lost through mortal sin and regained with the restoration of sanctifying grace.

We will now consider in greater detail this sacramental

grace of the priesthood which is intended to bear abundant fruit throughout the whole course of our life.

*The nature of sacramental grace—with special reference to the priesthood*

It is difficult to determine accurately the nature of sacramental grace, and the question is rarely given a sufficiently systematic treatment. Yet it does help to bring out in greater relief the dignity of our priesthood. We will begin by noting what is more well known and certain about this question from Revelation.

At once we discover that more is known with certainty about the *purpose* of this grace than about its nature. In fact, the same holds true of habitual grace; what is primarily known with certainty about this gift is that it is the seed of glory or of eternal life. But we know that this eternal life is a sharing in God's own intimate life through the Beatific Vision and an unceasing act of love—acts which necessarily presuppose a share in the divine nature. Therefore habitual grace must be some kind of participation in the divine nature or Godhead, in order to be the seed of glory.

And so it is the *purpose* of sacramental grace which is first made known to us by Revelation through Sacred Scripture and Tradition. It is conferred on man to help him exercise worthily and in close union with God those actions which he can perform validly by reason of the character he has received. Hence the sacramental grace of the priesthood is intended for the worthy and increasingly holy fulfilment of our priestly duties—consecration and sacramental absolution. This much is admitted as certain by all theologians.

But what of the nature of this grace? This can be deduced from its purpose, which is the primary cause of any being; an agent only acts with a definite end in view, and produces a perfection which corresponds to that end. Cf. IIIa, q. 62, a. 2. St. Thomas asks whether the sacramental grace adds anything further to habitual grace which he calls “the grace of the virtues and gifts”, since the infused virtues and the seven gifts have their origin in that grace—that was true even of Adam before his fall and of the angels, although they had not received the sacraments. He replies that it must add something, otherwise there would be no point in conferring the sacraments

on those who already possess the grace of the virtues and gifts.

Confirmation and the Eucharist are received by persons already baptized, but such sacraments are meaningless unless they produce some special effect. To suggest that they merely produce an increase of grace is not sufficient, for the frequent repetition of one and the same sacrament would have a similar effect. Certainly there would never be any need for more than three sacraments: Baptism for the reception of the first grace, Penance for those who had lost their baptismal grace, and a third sacrament for the increase of grace in the just. So any solution of the problem along those lines could never explain why there are seven sacraments specifically distinct from each other, which must, therefore, confer a special grace if they are not to be pointless. The whole question depends on this notion of “purpose.”

The Council of Florence uses a similar argument, although expressing it in a different form (Denz. 695): “By Baptism we are spiritually *reborn*; by Confirmation we receive an *increase* of grace and are strengthened in faith; already reborn and strengthened we are then *nourished* with the divine food of the Eucharist. If the soul should fall sick through sin, we are spiritually *healed* through Penance, etc.” The Council of Trent declares (Denz. 847): “If anyone should say that the sacraments of the New Law are not essential for salvation but superfluous . . . let him be anathema.” Therefore the sacramental grace does add something to habitual or sanctifying grace.

But what does it add? This can also be deduced from its purpose, but in order to be methodical we must first decide what it does not add and what is the general teaching of theologians on this point. In this way it will prove possible to discover what is admitted as certain by everyone and what is the more probable opinion where certainty cannot be attained.<sup>1</sup>

It is the common teaching of theologians that sacramental

<sup>1</sup> Many opinions have been expressed on the nature of sacramental grace.  
 (1) There were at one time some who held that it was a special infused habit distinct from habitual grace, from the infused virtues and from the seven gifts.  
 (2) Others think that it is not a distinct habit but a reality giving a definite title to special graces which will enable a man to fulfil the obligations flowing from the sacrament. (3) Others assert that it is a special mode of the grace of the virtues and gifts establishing a right to the actual graces already mentioned. An entire thesis could be devoted to this question, having special regard for the purpose of this grace.

grace is not a new infused habit distinct from sanctifying grace. On the one hand, the soul is already sufficiently sanctified in its essence by habitual grace which makes us sharers in the divine nature, just as Adam before his fall and the angels were sanctified without receiving the sacraments; on the other hand, the faculties of our soul are sufficiently empowered to perform supernatural acts by the infused virtues and the seven gifts, which flow from sanctifying grace. Cf. St. Thomas, loc. cit., ad. 1. Therefore sacramental grace is not a new infused habit.

All theologians are also agreed that the sacramental grace adds to sanctifying grace a definite right to receive at the appropriate moment those actual graces which correspond to the end of each of the sacraments. Without this addition the sacramental grace would be possessed by anyone in the state of sanctifying grace, and thus no special grace would be produced by any of the sacraments. So the very least we can say of each of the sacraments is that they give this title to special actual graces. Cf. St. Thomas, loc. cit., corp.

But this title, being a relative and moral reality, needs a real foundation which cannot be other than the sacramental grace enduring in the soul as an intrinsic reality. We know already that our right to an eternal inheritance is founded on habitual grace—the seed of glory—and on our meritorious acts which obtain an intensification of that grace. So in a similar way the right to the actual graces corresponding to the particular end of each sacrament is founded on the sacramental grace itself, which cannot be regarded as a mere moral or relative entity but must be the foundation of that right; it is a permanent, intrinsic, and supernatural reality inhering in the soul. Cf. St. Thomas, loc. cit., ad. 3. Of this we are certain from what has been revealed about the purpose of sacramental grace. St. Paul speaks about this permanent supernatural reality in 1 Tim. iv, 14: "A special grace has been entrusted to thee; prophecy awarded it, and the imposition of the presbyters' hands went with it; do not let it suffer from neglect."

Is it possible to be more precise in determining the nature of this permanent supernatural reality if it is not a new habit distinct from sanctifying grace, the infused virtues or the gifts? So far we have moved in the realms of certainty but now we must descend to probability.

It seems to be the more probable opinion held by John of St. Thomas, the theologians of Salamanca, Contenson, Hugon, Merkelbach, and many other Thomists that the sacramental grace is a special modification and strengthening of sanctifying grace, which exerts an influence on the acts of the various virtues. Cf. *De Veritate*, q. 27, a. 5, ad 12. We know already that the grace of original justice had a particular vital force of its own in addition to habitual grace which has now been restored to us, and it is this special vigour which is given back to us in some measure by the proper effects of each of the sacraments. This modal reality added to habitual grace forms the basis of the moral right to the future reception of actual graces corresponding to the sacrament received. We find something similar—although on a higher plane—in the lives of Our Lady and St. Joseph. Our Lady was given the grace of motherhood, the love and tenderness of a mother; St. Joseph the love and prudence of a foster-father, both of them thus receiving a special modification and strengthening of sanctifying grace.

Although all the statements in this section have been deduced from the purpose of the sacraments, this final conclusion cannot be put forward as anything other than the more probable opinion.

But our view can be confirmed by considering each of the sacraments in turn. The grace of Baptism is given not merely to make us capable of living a supernatural life—such as was enjoyed by Adam before his fall and by the angels—but in order to help us to live as Christians by following the example of Christ in his work of Redemption. And so this grace by enabling us to live as Christians disposes us to love the cross, a disposition not present either in the good angels or in Adam before their fall.

The grace of Confirmation is intended to make us constant and prudent in witnessing to the truth of the Christian faith. The grace of Holy Communion is given to unite us more closely to Christ through an increase of charity. The sacramental grace of Penance is meant as a help for avoiding the occasions of sin. The sacramental grace of Marriage strengthens the parties to live as followers of Christ in their married state and to educate their children according to Christian principles. The

grace of Holy Orders is conferred that the priest may fulfil his sacred duties—the act of consecration, sacramental absolution, preaching, spiritual direction—with ever-increasing holiness: and so we speak of priestly love and priestly prudence. It is clear, therefore, that the modality of habitual grace, about which we have spoken above, exercises an influence on the infused virtues which flow from sanctifying grace.

Notice once again that it is the purpose of the sacraments which is always acting as our guide in this question—a clear and practical illustration of the principle that the final cause is the primary cause, since it provides the reason for the existence of the other three.

*Corollaries.* Therefore the sacramental grace of the priesthood, since it is a permanent and intrinsic mode of habitual grace, can be looked upon as a feature of the priest's spiritual character which is meant to develop and grow to perfection—to the age of maturity in the spiritual life.

It follows that while no growth is possible in the character of Holy Orders which empowers a man to exercise validly the priestly functions, yet the sacramental grace, having as its aim an *increasingly* holy celebration of Mass and administration of Penance, is intensified at the same time as habitual grace which it modifies and strengthens in a special way. True, this is not expressed in so many words in the theological works but it is deduced as certain from the purpose of these divine gifts.

And thus all are agreed that the sacramental grace of Holy Orders should bear fruit and that it entitles a man to further and higher actual graces—provided no obstacle is put in the way. It develops rather like the features of a child's countenance which change with the different facial expressions of smiling, crying, blinking, etc. Therefore, "how careful we must be not to lose that sacramental grace or prove ourselves unworthy of it by receiving the sacrament without the suitable dispositions" (Billuart).

The value of our priesthood is also evident in the fact to which we have already alluded—namely, that so far as the consecration of the Eucharist is concerned, the Bishop himself has no greater power than the priest. And this power of consecrating the Body of Christ is far more outstanding than the power of consecrating priests and chalices, because the Holy Eucharist is

the supreme sacrament and sacrifice, containing not merely the gift of grace but the very author of grace. So we find St. Thomas, St. Albert, St. Bonayventure, Scotus, and Soto of the opinion that the Episcopate is not a separate sacrament from that of the priesthood<sup>1</sup> but is its extension and perfect complement, giving the power to ordain, confirm and govern. It is, therefore, the fulness of the priesthood and is intended to be as fruitful in the bishop as the grace of the priesthood should be in the priest.

Our dignity is further revealed in the sacrament of Penance. In order to receive absolution men and women entrust the priest with their secret thoughts and desires, which not even the angels themselves are allowed to know. And thus the priest actually co-operates with God in giving back life to the soul. So whether he is celebrating Mass or ministering to souls he is another Christ. His priesthood is a splendid participation in the supreme priesthood of Christ; he is Christ's minister, his living conscious instrument for the saving of souls.

Remember that the priest in celebrating Mass is so closely united to Christ—the principal offerer—as his instrument that the one effect of consecration is produced by both of them together, just as the writer and his pen produce the same effect. The effect of consecration—the changing of the substance of bread and wine—is produced by God as the principal agent, by the humanity of Christ as the instrument conjoined to the divinity, and by the celebrant as a separate instrument, conscious and free.

It might be objected that the sacramental grace of the priesthood is of less worth than the priestly character for although the latter is indelible, sacramental grace, like sanctifying grace, is lost by mortal sin. This is a serious difficulty, since the more perfect an accidental reality, the more firmly does it inhere in the substance to which it belongs. Therefore grace which can be lost does appear to be less perfect than the character which can never be lost.

In reply to this objection, notice why it is that the character cannot be lost. It is not because of its own perfection and greater dignity, but because it is conferred for the *valid* celebration of Mass and for the *valid* administration of Penance, which

<sup>1</sup> And thus it would be inferior to the priesthood.

provide for the spiritual welfare of the faithful. This is very well explained by St. Thomas, IIIa, q. 63, a. 5c: "The sacramental character is a sharing in Christ's priesthood by his faithful . . ."; also in answer to the first objection: "Grace is present in the soul as a form complete in its being, whereas the character is there as an instrumental power. Now a complete form is present in its subject according to the condition of that subject,<sup>1</sup> so that grace is present in the soul of a person here on earth according to the volatile nature of the will. But an instrumental power is to be considered rather from the point of view of the condition of the principal agent; hence the character is indelibly present in the soul not because of any perfection of its own but because of the perfection belonging to Christ's priesthood from which the character originates as an instrumental power."

Again, in answer to the third objection, St. Thomas says: "The character endures even after this life, in the good as redounding to their glory, in the wicked as stressing their disgrace, just as the character of military service remains in a soldier after the victory has been won, as a mark of honour in the victors, as a mark of dishonour in the vanquished."

This concludes for the present our study of the dignity of Christ's priesthood and of ours.

*Summary.* It is impossible to think of any priesthood more perfect than that of Christ, since his union with God, with the victim, and with the people could never be surpassed.

Our own priesthood, on account of its character and the sacramental grace, is subordinated to Christ's priesthood in such a way that the same effect of consecration is produced by both, just as the writer and his pen combine to produce the same effect.

If we consider the act of consecrating the Eucharist, the power of a priest is not exceeded by that of Pope or Bishop.

Furthermore, in order to receive sacramental absolution and spiritual direction the faithful reveal to the priest their secret thoughts and desires, although they remain hidden from the angels.

While the indelible character which enables a priest to fulfil

<sup>1</sup> For instance, the knowledge of a student after his lectures will depend on his capacity.

his duties validly cannot be intensified in any way, the sacramental grace given for an increasingly holy offering of the Mass and absolving from sin can increase together with sanctifying grace of which it is a special determination. It develops as a feature of the priest's spiritual character and entitles him to receive further and more excellent actual graces, so that he may carry out his priestly functions with ever-growing sanctity until the day of his death. And thus, normally speaking, the priest's final Mass will be celebrated in a higher degree of holiness than was his first. Even though his sensible devotion may be weaker, his virtues of faith, hope, charity, and religion, aided by the seven gifts, will have grown stronger; and the sacramental grace as a mode of sanctifying grace will be exerting a greater influence on those virtues.

This was especially true of the saints, in the final Masses of St. John the Evangelist, St. Benedict, St. Dominic, St. Philip, St. Francis of Sales, St. Charles Borromeo, St. John Vianney.

*Part Two*

## THE INTERIOR LIFE OF THE PRIEST

In this second part we intend to consider: first, the life of Christ in his members; secondly, the priest's union with Christ as high priest; thirdly, the priest's union with Christ as victim; fourthly, the priest's Communion; fifthly, the four ends of sacrifice and priestly perfection; sixthly, the priest's union with Mary; seventhly, the example given by priests who were saints; eighthly, the excellence of priestly holiness which, according to the mind of the Roman Pontifical, is intended to be a model for all the faithful.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE LIFE OF CHRIST IN US, HIS MEMBERS<sup>1</sup>

WE will first examine the teaching of Christ and St. Paul; then the general nature of Christ's life within ourselves; and finally, the practical consequences of this teaching on the exercise of the various virtues.

#### *The teaching of Christ and St. Paul*

Christ himself said: "I am the true vine . . . you are its branches; if a man lives on in me and I in him, then he will yield abundant fruit; separated from me, you have no power to do anything" (John xv, 1 and 5). Nothing at all—not a single salutary act, and therefore no act which merits eternal life. Even the beginning of belief is due to the antecedent grace of Christ—contrary to the teaching of the semi-pelagians.

St. Paul preached a similar doctrine: "We have been planted together in Christ" (Rom. vi, 5), who is so to speak the root of all holiness, "and if the root is consecrated, the branches are consecrated too" (Rom. xi, 16). The same truth is expressed in another metaphor: "You are Christ's body, organs of it depending upon each other" (1 Cor. xii, 27), and this St. Paul often repeats.

Through our Baptism we have "died like him" to sin, we have been "buried with him", "come to life again with him" (Rom. vi, 4). In writing to the Galatians the Apostle says (iii, 27): "All you who have been baptized in Christ's name have put on

<sup>1</sup> Cf. St. Thomas, IIIa, q. 8; the encyclical of Pius XII *De Corpore mystico Christi*; and the many books which have been published recently on the mystical body, such as: Emile Mersch, S.J., *The Whole Christ* (English tr. by Fr. J. Kelly, S.J., Dobson, London, 1938); Ernest Mura, *Le Corps mystique du Christ, sa nature et sa vie divine*, 2e éd., 1936. I have already discussed this question in my work *The Three Ages of the Interior Life* (English tr. by Sister M. Timothea, vol. 1, pp. 109–118).

A small work by Paul de Jaegher, S.J., *One with Jesus* (English tr. by Burns, Oates and Washbourne, London, 1930), can be highly recommended for its doctrine but not for the presentation of that doctrine. The author seems to presume that his readers will have reached the passive state of the spiritual life, but there will be many who could not admit that. It would have been better to have begun by setting forth the Scriptural evidence for this teaching and then to have shown that souls must strive for such an intimate union with Christ. That is the plan I have adopted here.

the person of Christ." And so "for me, life means Christ" (Phil. i, 21). St. Thomas explains that just as the hunter lives for the chase, the soldier for war and military service, the student for study, so also the Christian—and especially the saint—lives for Christ who ardently desires to live in him and he in his turn lives in an atmosphere of faith and trust in Christ and of love for him. "The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send on my account, will in his turn make everything plain, and recall to your minds everything I have said to you" (John xiv, 26). By the gifts of wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, piety, fortitude, and even fear he will recall to your minds everything I have said to you, so that the words already spoken in the Gospel may become for you "words of eternal life", since they are "spirit and life."

We could not desire any clearer witness to the truth of Christ's life within us. "Yet I am alive; or rather, not I; it is Christ that lives in me" (Gal. ii, 20).

#### *The general nature of Christ's life in his members*

Christ himself as head of the Church has made satisfaction for all of us and has merited in strict justice all the sufficient and efficacious graces which we are receiving and will continue to receive in the future. At this present moment he is in Heaven making intercession on our behalf, and he is the physical instrumental cause of every grace we receive—the instrument conjoined to the divinity, whereas the sacraments are separate instruments for the conferring of grace. Cf. IIIa, q. 62, a. 5 and q. 8.

But what is required from our side so that we may share in this life of Christ? We must frequently call to mind and repeat to ourselves this truth: Christ desires to live in me, to pray, love, act, and suffer in me. Then we will be ready to lay aside freely our former self with its inordinate, lower and limited desires in exchange for the desires of Christ himself. This renunciation of our old self is of vital importance. Gradually we will come to realize the meaning of these words of St. John the Baptist: "He must become more and more, I must become less and less" (John iii, 30). Morally speaking, it is essential to forget one's own personality, to lose it—in the good sense of the word—for the sake of living in Christ as members in the head;

in other words, we must think, desire, and act with him and in him, in the same way as our hand moves under directions from the head.

By degrees the spirit of Christ will take the place of *our* spirit—a way of thinking, feeling, judging, loving, willing, doing, and suffering, a mental outlook which is extremely cramped and superficial since it is materially dependent on our physical temperament, on our heredity, on the influence of our surrounding circumstances and on the ideas of our time and locality. It is this spirit which must slowly yield ground to the spirit of Christ, to *his* way of looking at things, of judging, feeling, loving, acting, and suffering. Only then is Christ truly living within us.

And thus we find the saints attaining a higher selfless state in their spiritual life, a state vastly superior to that in which they possessed their own natural personality. As an example in the field of learning we can think of St. Thomas—the universal doctor of the Church—who never speaks of himself in his works but remains completely objective; as examples in the active life there are many saints who vividly portray the life of Christ in their actions, such as St. John Vianney. These saints have amply fulfilled the words of St. Paul: "Life means Christ." They alone have realized that our moral personality cannot be brought to its full perfection unless it is in some way lost in the person of Christ, just as a river only reaches its term when it flows into the sea. Consequently, the saints have substituted for their own ideas and judgments the judgments of Christ accepted on faith; their own will has made way for the holy will of Christ, and their own activity for his sanctifying activity. In this way they have become God's servants in the fullest sense of the word, just as our hand is the servant of the will. And so St. Paul could say: "Yet I am alive; or rather, not I; it is Christ that lives in me" (Gal. ii, 20). St. John Chrysostom said that the heart of Paul was the heart of Christ.

This does not mean that Christ must lower himself in any way in order to come down to our level of life, but we must offer ourselves to him, so that he may live in us his own divine life which far surpasses our own. Thus, when we pray, we must unite ourselves to the powerful prayer of Christ, so that our

prayer then becomes, so to speak, an extension or continuation of Christ's prayer.

If we adopt this way of life, our soul will not merely become more perfect but will also surrender itself completely so as to live in utter self-forgetfulness. It will then appreciate Christ's invitation to so many of the saints: "Allow me to live in you, while you die to yourself." That was the way followed by St. Benedict, St. Francis, St. Dominic, St. Vincent de Paul; these obtained the true freedom of the sons of God.

If this applies to the faithful—as, indeed, it does—then how much more to priests? We must be quit of the old self and "clothed in the new", "putting on the person of Christ" (Gal. iii, 27; Ephes. iv, 24; Rom. xiii, 14).

#### *The effect of this teaching on the practice of particular virtues*

The truths we have been considering have important consequences for the practice of prayer, humility, brotherly love, faith, hope, love of God, and submission to the cross.

*Prayer.* The soul will no longer pray for its own cribbed and narrow interests, but will regard its prayer as an extension and continuation of Christ's prayer, once it has penetrated the meaning of the words spoken to the Apostles: "Whatever request you make of the Father in my name, I will grant, so that through the Son the Father may be glorified; every request you make of me in my own name, I myself will grant it to you. . . . Until now, you have not been making any requests in my name; make them, and they will be granted, to bring you gladness in full measure" (John xiv, 13; xvi, 23).

During the Mass the soul will *worship* God in the name of Christ; it will *intercede* in the name of Christ for the conversion of innumerable souls both in the present and in the future; it will also make *reparation* in the name of Christ by accepting generously every annoyance; it will *thank* God in the name of Christ not only for individual benefits but also for the universal gifts of creation, elevation to the life of grace, the Incarnation, the Redemption, the Eucharist. On seeing the children receive their spiritual food it will join in Christ's praise of his Father: "O Father, who art Lord of heaven and earth, I give thee praise that thou hast revealed these mysteries to little children" (cf. Matt. xi, 25).

Such a soul will speak to our Blessed Lady as though with the voice of Christ and will find in her title of "Mother" hitherto unsuspected depths of meaning. It will understand better the wealth of Mary's spiritual motherhood for those struggling towards salvation.

The soul at this stage finds it easier to prolong its prayer throughout the day, offering at each hour the various actions of the Saviour, especially those which are recalled in the Rosary and in the Way of the Cross.

During its visits to the Blessed Sacrament this Christ-like soul offers to God the acts of the infant Jesus, the acts of his hidden life, of his public life, of his Passion, of his risen and eucharistic life. Christ lives in that soul as fully as possible, radiating, so to speak, his own contemplative prayer and salvific love into that soul.

*Humility.* This devoted soul begins to detest a life lived only for self: it begins to despise itself in comparison with Christ. More than ever before it sees how limited, confined, base, and opposed to the freedom of the sons of God is any excessive thought of self. It strips itself of this mental fashion in order to model itself through faith on the words of Christ which "are spirit and life."

It begins to shun self-love in all its forms as the chief obstacle to Christ living within us, just as the hand would hinder the life of the body if it were anxious to live for itself and not for the body.

Such a soul is ready to delight in humiliations and to accept contempt with little or no distress—it is only right that its defects should be noted in order that the excellence of Christ who must dwell within us should stand out in vivid contrast. Now it sees more clearly the significance of Christ's request: "Allow me to live in you while you die to yourself", and his promise: "While you are stricken with extreme poverty, I am rich and my riches will suffice for you." His riches are to be ours, our own personal property.

The soul learns to belittle its own limited virtues and to extol as its own possession the unlimited perfections of Christ himself. That which is highly prized by the proud and ambitious is reckoned of no account, since the soul has ceased caring for its own glory.

*Brotherly love.* The Christian soul begins to see others as Christ sees them, discovering in all a trait of beauty worthy of imitation, just as beauty can be found in each and every wild flower. She has a special love for the poor as the sorrowing members of Christ, and also for the children because of their innocence, loving them as far as possible as Christ loves them. She loves the aged whom others have forsaken, finding in many of them greater wisdom than elsewhere.

The *faith* of this soul is more and more enlightened by the gifts, becoming more penetrative and lucid. She looks at everything from Christ's point of view, asking herself what would Jesus think about this, what is he actually thinking about it. The soul realizes better the true value of the Mass, Holy Communion, and sacramental absolution. She has a keener insight into the spiritual meaning of everyday events, seeing the higher good which God intends through permitting evil. She says to herself: "Christ sees this higher good", and even she herself foresees it to some extent.

In a similar way her *confidence* increases, because the confidence of Christ has supplanted trust in self. The encouragement of Christ is constantly before her: "Have confidence, I have overcome the world"—I have overcome sin, death, and the devil. "Have confidence": and the soul replies by putting all her trust in God, no longer daring to hope in her own strength—like St. Paul: "When I am weakest, then I am strongest of all." St. Philip Neri used to say: "Whenever I lose hope in myself, then I can trust all the more in the grace of God." John Baptist Manzella, the apostle of Sardinia, adopted exactly the same attitude when he was face to face with great difficulties: "An act of despair—I do indeed despair of myself, I lose all hope, but I trust in God alone."

The *love* of God increases noticeably, because it is as though the love of Christ passes into the soul which begins to live by him, causing a spiritual ecstasy wherein the ardent soul goes out of itself, so to speak, and is carried towards God. In his natural state a man is nearly always thinking about himself and his own interests, at least in a confused way; but the man in whom Christ lives begins to think almost continuously of God. His love for God is fully sincere, acting as the foundation for the love of himself and his neighbour. This love has no other

purpose but the giving of greater glory to God in which he finds peace and joy, at least in the higher part of his being. Then it is that the soul dedicates itself without reserve to God, abandoning itself entirely into the hands of God.

And so is realized that prayer of Blessed Nicolaus von Flüe: "My Lord and my God, remove from me all that stands in the way of my coming to you; give me everything that will bring me closer to you; rid me of myself and take me completely into your possession."

Then the soul generously accepts the cross permitted by God so that it may co-operate more effectively in the saving of souls. That was the way taken by the saintly poor like St. Benedict Joseph Labre, and which is now being taken by many living in our own day—by the sick, for example, who suffer night and day without complaint, offering their sorrows in union with Christ for the conversion of sinners, knowing that without suffering the world can never enjoy true peace.

The reason why certain souls choose to make this generous offering of themselves to God as a victim and holocaust is because Christ, having foreseen their sufferings, inspires them to do so. He himself bears their pains as though he were suffering in them; in this sense he continues his agony until the end of time. It was Christ who was the strength of the martyrs, suffering in them, so to speak, during the first three centuries of the Church.

And it is this spirit which inspires the prayer of many at the present time: "Lord, in this time of world-wide strife, when a spirit of pride is being spread abroad denying all religion and God's existence, give me a deeper understanding of the mystery of the redemptive Incarnation and of your holy self-abasement in the Passion. Make me desire to share in your own humiliations and sorrows to the extent which your Providence desires. Make me discover in this desire peace, strength, and even at times joy according to your own good pleasure, in order to give strength to me and confidence to others."

This is true for all the faithful who desire to be saints: how much more for priests who by their ordination are specially obliged to strive for Christian perfection, seeing that they are to sanctify those committed to their care, who today are threatened by pernicious errors and false doctrines: they must

be able to lead back to the Christian way of life all who have abandoned it.

*Self-love: the greatest obstacle to Christ living in us*

Spiritual writers have no hesitation in saying that the most insidious enemy of the spiritual life is not the world with all its temptations, nor the devil with his many wiles, but inordinate love of self; if only we were to uproot this love from our nature, the temptations of the world and the craft of the devil would be overcome more easily. At the moment they find a willing accomplice in our unbalanced self-esteem.

Once again we turn to the teaching of St. Thomas (Ia IIae, q. 77 and q. 84), who explains in a concrete and practical way how this inordinate love of self is opposed to the love of God and more often than not destroys it: how this inordinate love of self is never completely annihilated even in perfect Christians: how we ought to meet the craftiness of this love: what is the best way of attacking it.<sup>1</sup>

*How this inordinate love of self obstructs the love of God and eventually often destroys it*

This excessive love of self is extremely cunning in many respects. Very often it assumes another name, e.g. honour, care of one's good name and dignity: it argues that a man just like an angel is bound to have a natural love for himself and to wish himself well. Where is there any lack of moderation in that? In fact, supernatural love urges us to love ourselves even more than our neighbour. But this disordered love of self conveniently forgets that in the natural order—no less than in the supernatural order—love of self must be subordinate to the love of God, the author of nature and grace. Or if it does remember this necessary subordination, it does so in such an abstract, theoretical way that it has no practical influence. And so, in effect, we are implicitly seeking our own interest, and gradually this self-regard becomes disproportionate as a result of original sin. Although Baptism removed from us this sin of our race, there still remain wounds in our nature in the

<sup>1</sup> The reader could refer with profit to the practical work written by a Vincentian missionary, Paolo Provera, *Diamoci a Dio*, Turin, 1945, p. 89: "Our most fearful enemy is self-love and we must imitate the surgeon in the use of his scalpel in order to rid ourselves of this growth."

form of a scar which is re-opened from time to time by our own personal sins.

This inordinate love of self can slowly introduce its own disorder into most of our acts, even into our higher acts, if we direct them towards ourselves for our own natural satisfaction instead of towards God. By degrees this disease spreads throughout the whole of our interior life, halting the growth of Christ's union with us. This was certainly exaggerated by La Rochefoucauld in his book *Les Maximes* and by the Jansenists, but at the same time there was a great deal of truth in what they said.

So we find that many make no effort to foster in themselves a love for God, but develop an exaggerated admiration for self and its talents and are continually looking for approval and praise from others. They are blind to their own failings but never cease exaggerating the faults of others, rather after the fashion of critics in political journals. They are most severe in their judgments of others, while making excuses for themselves. The only remedy for such people would be humiliation, which they ought to recognize as promoting their welfare: "Lord, it is for my own benefit that you humiliate me." This immoderate regard for self breeds pride, vanity, and not infrequently concupiscence of the eyes and flesh, and then the capital sins which spring from these sin-bearing desires; for example, sloth, gluttony, impurity, hatred, anger, and so on.

The wide gulf between love of God and this inordinate love of self is obvious, in so far as the true lover of God is only anxious to do God's will and to please him, whereas the lover of self looks after his own personal satisfaction, even when this is not subordinated to God.

Love of God urges a soul to generosity, to a determined and practical effort for perfection: inordinate love of self urges a soul to avoid all inconvenience, self-denial, effort, and weariness. The love of God becomes more and more disinterested, it thinks it is never doing sufficient for God and other souls: inordinate love of self considers it is always doing too much for God and for other people. True love for God is anxious to credit God with all the glory and praise it receives for its apostolic zeal: inordinate love of self has no desire whatsoever

to give but only to receive, as though man was the centre of the universe to which everything must gravitate. If a priest walks along that road, his soul will be as barren as the fig-tree of the Gospel.

Finally, this self-idolatry leads to the destruction in our soul of all love of God and our neighbour, because of mortal sin which follows from it, especially repeated mortal sin. The soul becomes more and more confirmed in its antipathy to God, and immerses itself in temporal pleasure and a depraved love for self. In this way it would be possible for all our inclinations to be vitiated, as they are in the damned: for example, even the natural inclination to love God above all things as the author of nature is twisted in the devil, because in the damned this inclination gives rise to an inordinate desire to possess God not through any love for him, but because of their unbridled spiritual gluttony, in so far as they lack all other goods and satisfactions.

This tragic opposition between the two loves is often described by St. Augustine when he compares charity and cupidity. At the end of the fourteenth book of the *City of God* he writes: "Two loves have built two cities. The love of God even to the extent of despising self has built up the city of God, and the love of self even to the extent of despising God has built the city of Babylon or perdition." St. Paul had already written to Timothy (1 Tim. vi, 10): "The love of money (i.e. an inordinate love of self) is a root from which every kind of evil springs." When St. Thomas is considering the triple cause of the capital sins (Ia IIae, q. 77 and q. 84), he explains that the gratification of corrupt nature, the gratification of the eyes and the empty pomp of living are all derived from an inordinate love of self. This is clearly revealed in the lives of the wicked<sup>1</sup> and, from another angle, in the lives of imperfect Christians.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Inordinate love of self gives rise to—  
 —Pride { Anger  
Envy  
Spiritual sloth } Mental blindness in the place of living faith  
Vanity  
  
 —Concupiscence { of the eyes      Avarice . . . Despair instead of hope  
of the flesh { Gluttony } Discord and hatred of Impurity } God instead of love

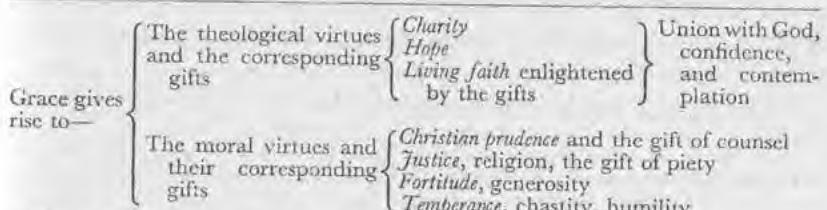
### How self-love remains concealed even in perfect Christians and priests

In the life of St. Vincent de Paul written by Domino Coste (I, 12; III, 300) the saint himself tells of an incident which occurred when he was studying at some college: "One day I was told that my father was coming to see me, but because he was only a poor farmer from the country I was loath to go and speak with him. On a previous occasion when my father was taking me to town, I was upset by his state of life and I felt ashamed of my own father."

When speaking of the period after the foundation of his Congregation the saint narrates the following story: "One of my nephews came to visit me at the college of which I was superior. Thinking of his uncouth appearance—as he would be badly dressed like all country folk—I directed that he should be brought to me without anyone else knowing. But immediately I changed my mind and resolved to make amends for this initial outburst of self-love. I went down to the door, embraced my nephew, led him by the hand to the community-room where my brethren were assembled, and introduced him to them: 'Here is a member of the family who is far more respectable than I am.' " In this way St. Vincent de Paul fought against his self-respect; even so he was still afraid that this victory might in fact have been a more subtle outlet for his self-love.

### The dangerous deceit of self-love

For example, it is quite possible for our mental prayer to be vitiated by an excessive desire for sense consolation, by spiritual gluttony, by sentimentality when there exists in our sense



Cf. *op cit.*, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, vol. 1, p. 321.

<sup>2</sup> Men often show themselves prompt and energetic in satisfying their own avarice, pride, and vanity, but when it comes to the fulfilment of some inconvenient obligation—even though it be a matter of grave duty towards God or their neighbour—they are slow, sluggish, and slothful. The power of inordinate self-love is almost unbelievable, and if we do not make the effort to destroy it, we may find ourselves sooner or later deprived of all love for God and our neighbour

nature a pretence to the love of God and our neighbour which is not sufficiently strong in the will. The soul is then seeking itself rather than God, and that is why God purifies our soul by sense aridity—in order to destroy this imperfection. If the soul fails to respond with generosity during this period of trial, it lapses into spiritual sloth and tepidity, making very little effort towards perfection.

In a similar way our intellectual or apostolic labours may be impaired by this disordered love of self, by trying to find in them personal satisfaction or praise rather than the glory of God and the saving of souls. And thus a preacher may find his words become fruitless and ineffectual “as sounding brass and tinkling cymbal.” The soul ceases to make progress, it no longer takes the initial steps along the road to perfection, it fails to reach the age of spiritual proficiency. The soul remains stunted in its growth, like a child who stops growing; he neither remains a child nor does he grow into a normal adult; he is a deformed dwarf. This sterility of life results from immoderate self-love.<sup>1</sup>

#### *The method of attack against this inordinate love of self*

It is essential for victory that we recognize our predominant failing and root it out. That failing is, so to speak, a caricature of the good inclination which ought to have prevailed, the reverse side of the coin. Then the battle is joined between the good inclination and the bad. Although it is true that the opposite vice to a virtue cannot be active in a person at the same time as the virtue, yet the tendencies to both can exist together. It is these which give rise to the struggle, the outcome of which will be victory either for the good inclination in the form of an active virtue or for the predominant failing in the form of an active vice.

The original predominant fault is the corruption of a virtue

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Matt. xxi, 19: “Jesus seeing a fig-tree by the roadside, went up to it, and found nothing but leaves on it. And he said to it, Let no fruit ever grow on thee hereafter; whereupon the fig-tree withered away.” St. Thomas makes the following comment: “Christ visited Judea, a country covered with leaves—that is, legal observances—but bearing no fruit. Some people, therefore, may appear outwardly as upright but inwardly they are evil and perverse. . . . Then followed the curse by which Christ signified the future sterility of Judea, as we read in Romans ix. And so it sometimes happens that those who give an external appearance of fruitfulness whereas they are in fact spiritually diseased are made to lose their vigour by God so as to prevent them causing damage to others.” God does this because of his great love for souls and his desire for their salvation.

into a vice which is materially similar to the virtue but formally opposed to it; for instance, the natural inclination to humility can degenerate into faintheartedness, the inclination to magnanimity into pride and ambition, the inclination to courage into bitter irony and cruelty, the inclination to justice into severity, the inclination to meekness and mercy into weakness. This can be better understood by considering, for example, how the virtue of humility is more directly opposed to pride than to faintheartedness which, however, is the contrary of humility; so is magnanimity more directly opposed to faintheartedness than to pride. And these two virtues are connected like the two curves of a Gothic arch.

What we must do is to discover the particular form of self-love in ourselves. Is it pride, or vanity, or laziness, or sensuality, or gluttony, or anger? We must ask ourselves: what is my predominant fault which reveals itself in the sins I commit more frequently, and which is continually captivating my imagination? Some will find it is their pride which keeps their tendency to anger in check so as to preserve the good opinion of others: some may find their pride restrained by sloth which no longer bothers about the good esteem of others.

So we must be on our guard to restrain this predominant failing with tenacity and perseverance, and thus gain the mastery over self for God's sake without regard for the praise of men. Although this is often a difficult task it will always lie within our power so long as we are on earth. God never makes impossible demands; he exhorts you both to do what you can and to ask for what you are not able to do, and he will give the help enabling you to do it.<sup>1</sup>

Even though some people do not have such a clear-cut predominant fault they will find their self-love revealing itself in various ways.

Everyone without exception must make war on the citadel of self from different points, denying it all opportunity of growing stronger, labouring more and more for the love of God, trying to please him by fulfilling first their obligatory and facile external tasks in a spirit of faith, and secondly, their more spiritual and difficult duties. And thus by degrees our life will

<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine, *De natura et gratia*, c. 43, n. 50—quoted by the Council of Trent (Denz. 804).

become dominated by the three theological virtues together with their corresponding gifts.

In this methodical assault on self three principal weapons are required: purity of intention, progressive self-denial, and habitual recollection.

*Purity of intention* is of the highest importance. "The eye is the light of the whole body, so that if thy eye is clear, the whole of thy body will be lit up; whereas if thy eye is diseased, the whole of thy body will be in darkness. And if the light which thou hast in thee is itself darkness, what of thy darkness? How deep will that be" (Matt. vi, 22). St. Thomas in his commentary on that passage says: "The eye signifies the intention. A man who desires to act first forms the intention. Therefore, if your intention is clear—that is, directed towards God—your whole body—your activities—will be clear." This is true of every good Christian and of every pastor who takes good care of the flock committed to his care.

This purity of intention must first be practised in the easy tasks of everyday life. It was in this way that St. Benedict used to train his religious, who often possessed little or no education: "Perform all the duties laid down by the Rule with a pure intention, in a spirit of faith, hope and love of God, in order to please God." By carrying out their external actions of the religious life in this spirit and with this purity of intention, these religious—including the lay brothers—reached a high degree of perfection and union with God. They subdued completely their inordinate self-love and became genuine saints to the immense spiritual profit of their neighbour. Hence we read in St. Luke's Gospel xvi, 10: "He who is trustworthy over a little sum is trustworthy over a greater", or will be, even to the point of martyrdom. St. Augustine used to say: "Details are in themselves of little value, but constant faithfulness even in details is of the highest value."

*Progressive self-denial*, both external and internal, must also be observed: "If any man has a mind to come my way, let him renounce self" (Mark viii, 34). No opportunity should be wasted, so that the love of God and our neighbour may gradually gain the mastery over our inordinate self-love. This is expected even of the faithful in general in order that they may tend in their own sphere of life to that perfection of charity

expressed in the supreme precept: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with the love of thy whole heart . . ."; with even greater reason is the same mortification expected of religious and priests, especially if they have the care of souls.

*Habitual recollection* is required if union with God is to be maintained, and this not only while hearing confessions, celebrating Mass and preaching the divine word, but always, so that at every moment of the day he will be a pattern to his flock, a priest in whom Christ is evidently living.

Such a priest is then prepared for Christ to come and dwell within him; this is obvious from his humility and simplicity, from his way of thinking which is guided by the principles of faith, from his confidence, from his zeal for souls and for God. Gradually he will find verified in his own life the picture drawn by St. Augustine: his soul will travel further and further away from the city of perdition in which the love of self becomes so brazen as to despise God, and will draw near to the heavenly city in which the love of God develops into a complete contempt for self by uniting together true humility with charity for God and one's neighbour. And so with the help of God's grace the victory will be won for his glory and the salvation of souls.

Recently I came across the following inscription in a Carmelite monastery: "Look for God alone and you will find him." Would that our intention were always as single-eyed as that, and then with the aid of God's grace it would infallibly direct us towards our final end. That was the promise made by Christ: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these other things (food and clothing) will be added unto you" (Matt. vi, 33).

## CHAPTER TWO

## THE PRIEST IN UNION WITH CHRIST AS PRIEST

**S**UMMARY. By virtue of his priesthood every priest is bound to strive for this union with Christ because of his ordination, because of his duties towards the sacramental body of Christ, and because of his duties towards the mystical body of Christ.

Consequent on the degree of union existing between the priest and Christ there are different ways of celebrating Mass: sacrilegiously, hurriedly, with external correctness, worthily in a spirit of faith, and after the manner of the saints.

*By virtue of his priesthood every priest must be closely united to Christ*

All the faithful, while they are here on earth, are obliged to make continual progress in observing the supreme commandment of love of God and their neighbour, since this precept is not confined to any particular degree of charity—it is not limited to the ten commandments, for example. Where is there mention of any limit in this command: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with the love of thy whole heart, and thy whole soul, and thy whole strength, and thy whole mind; and thy neighbour as thyself” (Luke x, 27; Deut. vi, 5)? The charity of a traveller on the way to eternity must for ever be increasing, as it is by growth in charity—by the steps of love—that he advances towards God.<sup>1</sup>

This perfection of charity does not fall under the precept as something to be realized at once, but as the end towards which everyone must tend according to his own condition in life, whether it be in the married state, or in the priestly life, or in the religious state as a lay brother or as a sister.<sup>2</sup> A soul not desirous of growing in charity would sin against the supreme commandment which does not place any limit to the virtue. Such a person would no longer be striving for his goal in life, but acting as though he had already reached it—which he certainly has not. So all the faithful without exception are

affected by this general obligation based on the supreme precept to tend towards the perfection of charity, which is, in fact, the perfection of the Christian life, since it is charity which unites us to God and commands all the other virtues. But the priest has an additional obligation of striving for this perfection in view of his special vocation.

It is commonly taught that even a secular priest is obliged by reason of his ordination and priestly office to tend to perfection, properly so called; in fact, a greater interior holiness is demanded of him for the celebration of Mass and the sanctification of souls than is required of a religious who is not a priest—such as a lay brother or a sister.

This special obligation is founded on his ordination, on his duties towards the sacramental body of Christ, and on his duties towards the mystical body of Christ. This is of faith, at least according to the ordinary and universal magisterium of the Church as expressed in the Pontifical.

In the first place, therefore, his *ordination* binds him to strive for perfection. This is stated in the Roman Pontifical during the ordination of a priest: “The Lord chose the seventy-two and sent them forth in pairs to preach before him, thus teaching both by word and deed that the ministers of the Church should be perfect in faith and action; that is, well-grounded in the virtue of the two-fold love of God and their neighbour.”<sup>1</sup>

This is evident from the conditions required prior to ordination and from its effects.

Priestly ordination demands the state of grace, a special aptitude for the priestly life, and a higher virtue than that required for entering the religious state. Cf. St. Thomas, Summa, IIa IIae, q. 189, a. 1, ad 3: “Sacred orders presuppose holiness, whereas the religious life is a series of exercises for acquiring holiness.” Furthermore, tradition would seem to imply that all that is required for entering religion is that the postulant should have reached the spiritual age of beginners—the purgative way; for priestly ordination, the appropriate spiritual age is that of proficients—the illuminative way; whereas bishops should be in the state of perfection—the unitive way (see St. Thomas, Summa, IIa IIae, q. 184, a. 7

<sup>1</sup> Cf. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 184, a. 3, ad 2.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, vol. 1, p. 203.

<sup>1</sup> St. Thomas, IV Sent., dist. 24, q. 2. The same point is developed by Cardinal Mercier in his book *La vie intérieure, appel aux âmes sacerdotales*, 1919, pp. 140–167, 200.

and 8). In the eighth article St. Thomas says: "By holy orders a man is appointed to the loftiest ministry, to serve Christ himself in the sacrament of the altar. This demands greater interior sanctity than that required for the religious state"; for example, in a lay brother, or sister, or professed novice.

The effects of ordination also show that a priest has a special obligation of tending to perfection. In this sacrament the priest receives a character which gives him a permanent share in the priesthood of Christ, enabling him to consecrate and absolve validly. A saint who was not a priest—such as St. Benedict Joseph Labre—would be able to pronounce the words of consecration and the formula of absolution, but the bread and wine would remain unchanged, and sin would not be forgiven. The same would be true of an angel and of Our Blessed Lady (although she herself did give to the second person of the Trinity something more—his human nature, and she offered with him a sacrifice accompanied by a real and not merely a mystical shedding of blood). In addition, at the moment of ordination the priest receives the sacramental grace of Holy Orders to carry out with increasing holiness his priestly functions. St. Thomas writes, in IV Sent., dist. 24, q. 2: "They who belong to the divine ministry assume a royal dignity and ought to be perfect in virtue"; this is also repeated in the Pontifical.<sup>1</sup> And thus priestly ordination is certainly superior to religious profession. This sacramental grace of Holy Orders is a modal reality added to habitual grace, which gives the priest a right to receive all the actual graces he needs for an increasingly holier celebration of the Mass. Cf. *The Imitation of Christ*, bk. iv, c. 5: "Thou art made a priest and art consecrated to celebrate; see now that faithfully and devoutly, in due time, thou offer up the sacrifice to God, and that thou show thyself blameless. Thou hast not lightened thy burden, but art now bound by a stricter bond of discipline and obliged to greater perfection of sanctity. A priest ought to be adorned with all virtues and set the example to others of a good life."

In the second place, the duties of a priest towards the sacramental body of Christ show even more clearly his special obligation of tending to perfection. The priest celebrating Mass stands in

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Suppl. Summae Theol.*, q. 35, a. 1, 2, *de Ordine*; and *Summa*, IIIa, q. 63, a. 3.

the place of Christ; he is, as we say, another Christ. Therefore, in order to be a minister fully conscious of his position and to offer the sacrifice worthily and holily, the priest should unite himself mind and heart to the principal priest, who is at the same time the sacred victim. To approach the altar without a firm determination to grow in charity would be hypocrisy, and this would be at least indirectly willed because of the priest's negligence, since no one is exempt from making that progress in charity which corresponds to their condition in life, by reason of the supreme commandment of limitless love: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with the love of thy whole heart . . .".

The purity of soul required for the celebration of Mass—or, at least clearly suited to it—is well described in *The Imitation of Christ*, bk. iv, c. 5: "The priest, clad in sacred vestments, is Christ's vicegerent that he may suppliantly and humbly pray to God for himself and all the people. He has before and behind him the sign of the Cross of our Lord, that he may always remember the passion of Christ. Before him he beareth the cross on the chasuble, that he may diligently behold the footsteps of Christ and fervently endeavour to follow after them. Behind him he is marked with the cross, that he may mildly suffer for God's sake whatsoever adversities befall him from others."

And finally, the priest's special obligation to tend to perfection is confirmed by his *duties towards the mystical body of Christ*. He is called upon to sanctify others by preaching the word and by spiritual direction both inside and outside the confessional.<sup>1</sup>

This intimate union between the priest and Christ has important consequences for the life of the priest.<sup>2</sup> He must look on himself as having been ordained primarily to offer the sacrifice of the Mass, which should guide both his study and the external works of his apostolate. For his study must have as its aim a deeper understanding of the mystery of Christ's priesthood; his apostolate must draw its inspiration from the union existing between himself and Christ the principal priest. So close is the union between the offering of the Mass and the continual offering made by Christ the eternal

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, vol. I, p. 221.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Fr. S. M. Giraud, *Prêtre e hostie*, 5<sup>e</sup> ed., 1924, vol. I, p. 270.

principal priest that the celebration of Mass is far superior to the functions of the guardian angels, and takes second place only to the unique mission of Our Blessed Lady, who gave the Son of God his human nature and offered with him the sacrificial outpouring of his blood on Calvary.

Theologians have wondered how it is possible for the ministry of a human priest to exceed the ministry of angels, seeing that they are of a higher nature. The answer is found in drawing a comparison between man and the eagle. The eagle, although of a lower nature, possesses wings and a keener vision. Now, as the eagle is superior to man in both these respects, so is the priest celebrating Mass and absolving from sin superior to the angels.

St. Ephraem in his work *De Sacerdotio* (Opera, Antwerp, 1619, p. 19) says: "The splendour of the priest's dignity is beyond all understanding and reason. He finds himself at ease in the company of angels. . . . And even with the Lord of the angels he is on terms of familiarity; and his authority entitles him to receive in some form or other whatever he desires as soon as he asks for it."

Is it surprising, therefore, that the author of the *Imitation* writes, bk. iv, c. 5: "If thou hadst the purity of an angel, and the sanctity of St. John the Baptist, thou wouldest neither be worthy to receive nor to handle this sacrament. . . . Great is the mystery, and great the dignity of priests, to whom is given that which to the angels is not granted."

A second practical consequence of the priest's union with Christ is that the priest should unite himself closely and humbly to the principal priest at the moment of consecration. If he effaces himself as much as possible in order to bring Christ to the fore, then he is invested with the honour and glory befitting a true representative of Christ: "He must become more and more, I must become less and less" (John iii, 30). Just as the humanity of Christ which lacked its own personality was surrounded with all possible honour and glory in virtue of its hypostatic union with the person of the Word, so also the priest who does not consecrate in his own name is exalted to the highest glory of heaven by becoming another Christ. If the humanity of Christ had been separated from the divine personality of the Word and had received a human personality,

it would thereby have lost the infinite value attaching to all its acts. Something similar would happen in the case of a priest who acted in his own name and not in the name of Christ; he would lose his dignity and be unable to perform the act of consecration.<sup>1</sup> St. Paul expresses well how the humility of a priest is actually his greatest glory, II Cor. iv, 7: "We have a treasure, then, in our keeping, but its shell is of perishable earthenware; it must be God, and not anything in ourselves, that gives it its sovereign power." The same idea is conveyed by the words of the liturgy: "God who exaltest the lowly and didst enthroned thy confessor blessed Francis of Paola in glory among the saints: grant we beseech thee . . ."

Only in the consecration and elevation of the body and blood of Christ does the priest exercise fully the power of his priesthood.

From all that we have said it is evident that the celebrant must continue to develop the intimacy of his union with Christ by a vigorous faith enlightened by the gifts of the Holy Ghost, by unlimited confidence, and by love which daily becomes more pure and perfect.

#### *Different ways of celebrating Mass*

It must always be remembered that the principal priest in the sacrifice of the Mass is Christ, and that the celebrant must be striving for an actual and closer union with him. There are, however, different ways of celebrating Mass: the sacrilegious Mass, the hurried Mass, the Mass which is outwardly correct but lacks the spirit of faith, the Mass which is celebrated worthily and holily, and the Mass of the saints. That was the picture presented to me during a conversation with the founder of the congregation known as the "Fraternité sacerdotale", and it is a picture which merits our careful consideration.

In the *sacrilegious Mass* the celebrant's mind and heart are at enmity with God and with Christ the principal priest. Such an unworthy celebration of the Mass is a heinous mortal sin. Nevertheless, the sacrifice will retain its infinite value because of the victim and principal offerer; so it will not be deprived of the infinite act of adoration, reparation, petition, and thanksgiving, which perseveres in the theandric act of the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Fr. S. M. Giraud, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 279.

principal offerer who lives on still to make intercession on our behalf.

But, in the event of the interior state of this priest becoming known to the faithful, it is impossible to say how much harm will be caused by such a grave scandal.

*"Corruptio optimi pessima."* The whole meaning of the priestly life is distorted and falsified. The result is a simulated charity and prudence, hypocrisy, wrong counsel, unrighteous example. St. Catherine of Sienna often speaks of this scandal in her Dialogue, saying that the Church appeared to her as a virgin whose lips were being slowly eaten away with leprosy.

These acts of sacrilege demand reparation from the priest who commits them. Sometimes it is offered to God by specially favoured contemplative souls who undergo tremendous suffering for the conversion of priests who have sinned so wretchedly.

Then there is the *Mass which is said hurriedly*, which is celebrated with excessive speed in fifteen minutes, and sometimes with a doubtful conscience. This also, in its own way, is a cause of scandal. St. Alphonsus, as bishop, wrote about this way of celebrating Mass and forbade it in his own diocese.

This haste in saying Mass shows that the priest has lost sight of the true importance and seriousness of his life. For him it is no longer the Mass that matters most, but outward activity and a pseudo-apostolate. With the disappearance of almost every vestige of an interior life, there has disappeared also every hope of a fruitful apostolate, since that is the heart and soul of any genuine apostolate.

What a difference between this Mass and the Mass described by St. John Fisher, when addressing himself to the Lutherans of his day: "The Mass is the spiritual sun which rises every day to spread its light and heat to all souls."

A Mass offered in haste is a scandal, in so far as the Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, and Sanctus are recited mechanically without any spirit of faith: not even the words are pronounced correctly owing to the excessive speed. The prayers of the Missal are read as though they were of no importance, whereas they are pregnant with such meaning as will only be fully grasped in the light of the Beatific Vision.

The Mass becomes a mere formula of words, rendering contemplation impossible. And yet, if there are any words which

ought to be recited with the utmost care and contemplative insight, they are the words of the Missal—the Kyrie, the Gloria, and the Credo. But in the hasty Mass they are recited mechanically in order to finish the Mass more quickly. Genuflections are made with equal haste—empty gestures, devoid of the spirit of worship. How much harm may be inflicted on souls drawing near to the Catholic Church and looking for the genuine priest with whom they can freely discuss their conscience, in order to discover the truth. Baron von Hügel, who wrote a life of St. Catherine of Genoa, used to say: "Some priests have as much religion as my shoe."

After these hurried Masses thanksgiving is usually omitted or else reduced to the barest minimum.

We next turn to the *Mass which is outwardly correct but lacks the spirit of faith*. In this Mass the priest pays careful heed to the external rite, to all the rubrics—perhaps he himself is a keen rubrician—but he offers the Mass as though he were nothing more than a mere ecclesiastical official, seemingly devoid of any spirit of worship. He knows the rubrics and observes them, but he pays little regard to the infinite worth of the Mass or to the principal offerer whose minister he is. Such a priest is another Christ in outward appearance only, in so far as he possesses the priestly character enabling him to offer Mass validly, but he displays no signs of the true spirit of a priest. It would appear that since the day of his ordination sanctifying grace and the sacramental grace of Orders have not increased to any appreciable extent, although they were given as a treasure to yield rich dividends.\*

True, the priest who celebrates in this way will think he is saying his Mass extremely well by reason of his scrupulous regard for the rubrics, but that is the limit of his aspirations. The Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, the words of Consecration, and the Communion prayers, are said without any spirit of belief.

If these priests die in the state of grace, they must bitterly regret in Purgatory their lack of care in offering sacrifice. How eagerly must they look for a Mass offered with genuine devotion as an act of reparation on their behalf.

In contrast, the *Mass which is faithfully and worthily celebrated* is a Mass offered in a spirit of faith, of confidence in God, and

\* See note at the end of this chapter.

of love for God and one's neighbour. In such a sacrifice we witness the impulse and guidance of the theological virtues which inspire the virtue of religion. The Kyrie eleison is a genuine prayer of petition; the Gloria in excelsis Deo is an act of adoration of God on high; the Gospel of the day is read with keen belief in what it contains; the words of Consecration are pronounced by a minister in actual union with Christ the principal offerer, by one who realizes to some extent the wide diffusion of the spiritual effects of his offering and sacramental immolation to the souls in this world and to those in Purgatory. The Agnus Dei is a sincere request for the forgiveness of sin; the priest's Communion leaves nothing to be desired—it is always more fervent and more fruitful than the day before, because of the daily growth in charity produced by this sacrament of the Eucharist. The distribution of Holy Communion is not approached in any perfunctory spirit, but is treated as the means of bestowing on the faithful superabundant life, of giving them an even greater share in the divine life. The sacrifice is then brought to its conclusion with a simple but effective contemplation on the Prologue to St. John's Gospel. Afterwards the priest will make his private thanksgiving which, if time permits, will be prolonged on certain feast-days in the form of mental prayer. There is no more suitable time for intimate prayer than when Christ is sacramentally present within us, and when our soul, if recollected, is under his actual influence.

Finally, we must consider *the Mass of the saints*. The eucharistic sacrifice offered by St. John the Evangelist in the presence of the Blessed Virgin Mary was, indeed, a sacramental continuation of the sacrifice of the Cross, which remained indelibly printed on the minds of Our Lady and her spiritual son. Then again, the Mass offered by St. Augustine after the hours of contemplation expressed in his works *De Civitate Dei* and *De Trinitate* must have been celebrated in the closest union possible with Christ the priest.

The same was true of the Masses celebrated by St. Dominic, St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure, who composed the thanksgiving prayers still in use to-day. St. Philip Neri was frequently rapt in ecstasy after the consecration, so intense was his contemplation and love of Jesus, the priest and victim.

Many of the faithful who witnessed St. Francis of Sales celebrating Mass held him in the highest veneration.

St. John Baptist Vianney used to say: "We would certainly die if we understood the real meaning of the Mass. . . . In order to celebrate worthily, the priest would have to be a saint. When we are in Heaven, we will then appreciate to the full the value of the Mass, and our own lack of reverence, adoration, and recollection during the Mass."<sup>23</sup>

The author of the *Imitation* says that the disciple of Christ should always unite the personal offering of his own sufferings to the offering made by Christ himself, the priest and victim of the Mass. Fr. Charles de Foucauld, when offering Mass in Africa amongst the Mohammedans, used to offer himself to God on their behalf in order to pave the way for their future conversion.

The Mass of the saints is, so to say, the prelude or beginning of that unending worship in heaven, which already finds expression in the words at the end of the Preface: "Holy, holy, holy."

Think of the influence of such Masses on the faithful. There they learn to recognize the dignity of our priesthood which is the continuation of Christ's priesthood. They gradually come to look on Christ not merely as a figure of history who once walked the streets of Palestine, but as the God-man who lives on still to make intercession on our behalf.

They begin to realize that they themselves are living members of Christ's mystical body. They give God heartfelt thanks for all the benefits they have received since the day of their Baptism, and earnestly desire a fervent and fruitful Communion.

They appreciate better the infinite value of the Mass. They find it easier to understand how one Mass can provide as much light and life for a thousand souls as for one, provided that they are well disposed. In this the Mass resembles the sun, which radiates its light and warmth to any number of people in the open. The Mass is in its essentials the continuation of the sacrifice of the Cross, which can be as profitable for all men as it was for the repentant thief, since Christ died for the whole world. Every Mass has an infinite value because of the principal offerer and the victim offered. But the faithful should be able to grasp this limitless worth of the Mass from the way in which it is celebrated.

In practice, therefore, the Mass itself ought to be prepared; for example, the priest should read over the prayers and the Epistle and Gospel of the day slowly and in a spirit of faith, so that he may say them better during the actual sacrifice. He must also ask for the spirit of prayer. And after Mass his thanksgiving should not be curtailed, but ought to last as long as the needs of the day will permit—certainly for half an hour, if he foresees that he is not likely to have any time later in the day for a visit to the Blessed Sacrament or for mental prayer.

If priests would only celebrate Mass in this way, their whole life—especially their recitation of the breviary—would become an extension of the Mass, a daily accompaniment to the sacrifice of the altar. Their life would be more in keeping with the spirit of the Incarnation, the Redemption, and the Eucharist, as the venerable Father Chevrier—a friend of St. John Vianney—used to say to the priests whom he trained.<sup>1</sup>

#### *The friendship which Christ desires to enjoy with his priests*

Bossuet, in his panegyric on St. John the Apostle, describes how Christ's affection for his beloved disciple portrays vividly the friendship which he desires to share with his priests. Christ, he says, showed his love for St. John by drawing him close to his heart at the Last Supper, by giving him his own mother on Calvary, and by offering him his cross in order to make his ministry fruitful.

At the Last Supper the Apostles were ordained priests, and Christ rested the head of St. John close to his own heart. This gesture produced what it signified; at that moment John received the grace of understanding and love, enabling him to appreciate better the love which Christ had shown for us by instituting the Holy Eucharist. So it was that John the Evangelist became the doctor of charity, writing in his Epistles that charity includes all the other virtues.

But Christ favours the priest of to-day as much as he did St. John. Doesn't he give his heart to every priest in the Mass, especially in Holy Communion which brings a daily increase in charity in proportion to the generosity of our present dispositions? And if our love increases day by day, then each of our

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, vol. I, p. 222.

Communions ought to be spiritually more fervent than the one preceding.

On Calvary, Christ gave his own mother to St. John to become his spiritual mother, and by her prayers, example, and words she enlightened his understanding to an even greater extent than St. Monica influenced the mind of her son.

Christ continues to make his mother the protectress and spiritual mother of all priests. A confident and humble approach to her is inevitably rewarded by a deeper insight into the mysteries of the Incarnation, the Redemption, and the Eucharist. The Mother of God has always lived in close contact with these mysteries, and she is anxious to help us also to penetrate them more deeply.

His heart, his mother—finally, his cross. This was the third gift from Christ to St. John, as is revealed in the question he put to John and his brother: "Have you strength to drink of the cup I am to drink of?" John and his brother replied: "We have." And he said to them: "You shall indeed drink of my cup" (Matt. xx, 23). In fact, both of them were martyred. Although John himself did not suffer physical martyrdom, he was crucified in spirit by his extreme anguish of soul caused by the denial of Christ's divinity which he had so strenuously defended in his Gospel, in his Epistles and in all his preaching. He was also worried by the dissensions amongst his fellow Christians, constantly exhorting them: "My little children, love one another."

Every priest has his cross to bear either in the form of physical suffering or at least in the form of spiritual suffering. The cross is given to make his ministry effective, in the same way as the cross in the life of Christ was a source of unlimited grace because of the immense love which he had for his Father and for us. And thus Christ manifests a special love for his priests by granting them the valuable grace of love for the cross.

\* (The Council of Trent recommends great reverence and holiness to all who approach Communion, but declares that even those who have not these dispositions receive an increase, provided they are not in a state of sin. It seems, therefore, that the priest Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange has in mind would, during a lifetime, grow considerably in grace, provided he kept free from grave sin. It is precisely this last condition that would probably not be verified in one who, by definition, was continually so tepid. Positive dispositions are necessary for the secondary effects of the sacrament, such as spiritual refreshment and consolation. Also they increase immeasurably the direct effects of the sacrament; and finally, it would be tempting providence to expect to remain continually without serious sin, if one were so careless.—Tr. note.)

## CHAPTER THREE

THE PRIEST IN UNION WITH CHRIST AS VICTIM<sup>1</sup>

WHEN considering the priest's union with Christ as priest we saw that he was bound to strive for an intimate friendship with Christ by reason of his priesthood—that is, by reason of his ordination and his duties towards the sacramental body and the mystical body of Christ.

Furthermore, the priest is ordained primarily to offer the sacrifice of the Mass. If he humbles himself during the Mass in order to exalt Christ, he is surrounded with the praise and honour befitting a vicegerent of Christ. And the Saviour invites the priest to the same intimate friendship with himself as he offered to St. John the Evangelist to whom he gave his heart, his mother, and his cross.

But something more is necessary; the priest must be in his own way a victim. Why? Because Christ in offering himself during the sacrifice of the Mass offers also his entire mystical body, and especially his minister who is celebrating Mass. Therefore every priest has his own individual vocation to be a victim in order to become like to Christ.

The truth of this becomes even more evident if we consider the opposite error. Take the case of a priest who shares in the priesthood of Christ by virtue of his ordination and yet refuses to share in his state of victim. Such a priest is refusing the obligation laid on all the faithful of taking up the cross; and this obligation presses all the more urgently upon a priest in view of the fact that he is intended to be another Christ amongst the faithful.

Every priest must be a victim to the degree determined for him by Providence, and in the following pages we will develop that truth by considering the following points: the doctrinal basis of this teaching; examples taken from the lives of saints who were priests; the effects consequent on the non-fulfilment

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Pope Pius XI's encyclical *Mediator Dei et hominum*; and the Roman Pontifical *De ordinatione sacerdotali*. Also, Fr. Giraud, *Prêtre et hostie*, I, p. 270; II, pp. 399, 405-407, 411-414; and Fr. E. de la Croix, *Le saint sacrifice de la messe pour le prêtre*, Paris, 1936, p. 43 ss.

of this obligation; confirmation of this teaching from a comparison with the saintly priests of the Old Testament; how it determines the sterility or fruitfulness of the priest's ministry; the different degrees of union with Christ as victim dependent on the priest's progress in the spiritual life; St. Paul's teaching on the fruitfulness of the cross in the priest's life.

*The doctrinal basis of this teaching*

Christ is at the same time both priest and victim, and in offering himself to his Father in the sacrifice of the Mass he offers his mystical body also—every individual who belongs to the Church on earth, in Heaven, or in Purgatory. Consequently he also offers his minister.<sup>1</sup> He offers with intense love all his followers no matter what their state in life may be—the children, the poor, the sick, the high and the low, those who rule and those who belong to the lowest classes of society. He offers too those specially consecrated to his service, the just that they may progress further towards perfection, sinners that they may turn aside from their evil ways. Not a soul is forgotten—no one who is in his own individual way a member of Christ's mystical body.

All these souls must carry the cross each according to his own condition of life and thus share in the Saviour's state of victim—in the same way as all are called to the peak of charity in virtue of the supreme commandment, each according to his own condition. The Saviour's invitation is urgent and insistent: "If any man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink; yes, if a man believes in me . . . fountains of living water shall flow from his bosom" (John vii, 38). Everyone is offered to God, but especially the minister of Christ when he says in the name of Christ: "This is my body." Therefore every priest has a special and individual vocation to be a victim in order to be like the figure of Christ. To this call there ought to be a practical

<sup>1</sup> Cf. 1 Peter ii, 5 sq., and Rom. xii, 1, where it is stated that Christ offers all the faithful; a fortiori, he offers his priests. Moreover, Christ prayed for his priests at the Last Supper: "Holy Father, keep them (my Apostles) true to thy name, thy gift to me, that they may be one, as we are one. . . . Keep them holy, then, through the truth. . . . And I dedicate myself for their sakes, that they too may be dedicated through the truth" (John xvii, 11-19). This doctrine is well set forth in the *Imitation of Christ*, bk. iv, c. 9: "That we must offer ourselves and all that is ours to God and pray for all"; that is, we must offer to God "all our good works", "all the pious desires of devout persons", "prayers and this Sacrifice of Propitiation" for ourselves and for others.

response, so that Christ may be able to carry out his desires in our regard. A priest is not merely an orator, an eloquent exponent of doctrine or history, an exegete, or a canonist, but first and foremost he is meant to be a genuine priest.

#### *Examples given by saints who were priests*

In the Collect of the Mass for the feast of St. Vincent de Paul we pray to God: "God, who gave to blessed Vincent while daily celebrating the divine mysteries the grace of imitating that which he handled, listen graciously to our prayers that we also while offering the immaculate Victim may become a holocaust wholly acceptable to you." Father Liberman when asked what was the best way of celebrating Mass replied: "In the Mass Jesus immolates himself: let us make ourselves one and the same victim with him. I do not know any better way of celebrating Mass." Similar examples are to be found in the lives of St. John Vianney, St. John Bosco, St. Joseph Cottolengo, Fr. Charles de Foucauld, and many others. The author of the *Imitation of Christ* writes (Bk. iv, c. 10): "Blessed is he who offers himself up as a holocaust to the Lord, as often as he celebrates or communicates." Blessed, indeed, is that priest because he is a source of consolation to the Saviour and will be more richly rewarded and strengthened in his priestly vocation. The fruits of his ministry will never disappear. Pius XI wrote in his encyclical *Miserentissimus Redemptor*: "The immolation of priests and of other followers of Christ must be united to the august sacrifice of the Eucharist."

#### *Consequences of refusal*

What would happen to a priest already sharing in the priesthood of Christ by reason of his ordination, if he refused to share in Christ's condition of victim?<sup>1</sup> He would certainly be falling away from the priestly ideal: his life would become disordered, disturbed, and confused. He would remain a minister of Christ but without a sincere love for his affectionate Master. No longer a man of God but a man of the world, a man whose life has become vain, superficial, barren. This deplorable state of sterility reveals in an even better light the fruitfulness of a genuine apostolate, just as it is easier to appreciate the value of

justice when we see the suffering resulting from injustice. Every priest should ask for the grace to be a victim in the way God wants him to be, to suffer patiently whatever God has willed for him from all eternity, so that he takes up his cross each day not simply as a faithful follower of Christ but as a priest standing in the place of Christ himself. He must undergo a mystical death before his physical death.

#### *Confirmation from the Old Testament*

The doctrine outlined above is confirmed by comparing the priests of the present dispensation with the saintly priests of the Levitical priesthood. In the book of Numbers we read that the Levites were offered to God as the chosen section of the people of Israel: "Aaron will offer them (the Levites) to the Lord on Israel's behalf, to do him service" (Numbers viii, 11).

This is also evident from their office, as they were called upon to offer to God sheep and calves—irrational victims incapable of divine worship. Hence their immolation was intended to be an expression of the immolation of the humble and contrite hearts of priest and people. When this interior sacrifice was lacking, God rebuked them: "This people does me honour with its lips, but its heart is far from me" (Isaias xxix, 13; Matt. xv, 8).

Therefore the priests of the Old Testament were in virtue of their consecration victims of prayer, praise, atonement, and thanksgiving. William, bishop of Paris in the thirteenth century, in his book *De Legibus*, c. 24, places the following prayer on the lips of the good Levite: "It is to you, Lord, that I offer sacrifice and I acknowledge you as the author of all holiness. . . . As it is within my power to kill or not to kill this animal, so also are we in your power to be condemned through your justice because of our sins, or to be spared through your mercy. . . . May the death of this animal signify the death in me of sin through this sacrifice, so that my soul may devote its life to you." Those priests of the Old Testament who understood the meaning of their vocation and carried it out with joy were richly rewarded for being true harbingers of the sacrifice of Calvary.

This was especially true of the sacrifice of Abraham, who was

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Fr. Giraud, *op. cit.*, I, p. 288.

fully prepared to offer his own son Isaac as the victim. Here, in the commencement of this sacrifice, we can see a faint resemblance to the lofty sacrifice of the future Redeemer.

If these upright priests of the Old Testament were victims each in his own way, what are we to think of the priests of Christ who are ordained to be other Christs for the sanctification of the people? The priest of the present dispensation is no longer holding in his hands a mere lamb or dove, but a victim of infinite worth, the victim of love to whom he should be closely united. He himself must be both priest and victim: otherwise he is not another Christ. The priest cannot refuse to make this offering of himself.

If he limits his co-operation with the offering of Christ to pronouncing the words of consecration and the prayers of the Mass, he resembles a body without a soul, a corpse without life. In fact, he can be likened to the executioners of Christ who lent their physical assistance to his crucifixion, or to the nails fixed in his hands.

Any priest, especially a priest of the New Law, ought to recognize with joy and lasting gratitude that the state and dispositions of a victim represent the perfect fulfilling of his priestly vocation. Pope St. Gregory writes in his *Dialogues*, bk. iv, c. 59: "We who celebrate the mysteries of the Lord's Passion should imitate what we are doing. If we look for benefit from the victim which we offer, we must offer ourselves to God as a victim."<sup>1</sup>

The same idea is expressed by St. Gregory of Nanianzen, *Orat. ii, Apolog.*: "No one can approach the infinite God, our high priest and victim, if he himself is not a living and holy victim, if he does not offer himself in spiritual sacrifice, seeing that this is the sacrifice demanded by him who gave himself up entirely on our behalf. Without it I would not dare to bear the name or vestment of a priest." St. John Baptist Vianney used to say that a priest is most effective when he offers himself daily in sacrifice. Peter of Blois writes in his 123rd letter: "Only when a priest has the intention of offering himself in all humility by imitating that which he does will the victim of salvation be of benefit to him." On the day of ordination the Bishop warns the future priest: "Consider what you do: imitate that which you handle."

This victim is always imperfect but Christ will make up for our deficiency.

#### *The effect on a priest's ministry*

The fruitfulness or sterility of our ministry depends on our acceptance or rejection of this state of victim.<sup>1</sup> A priest who offers himself as a victim is capable of feeling for the faithful in their humiliations (cf. Heb. iv, 15). And by carrying the sorrows of others he becomes more intimately united with Christ. But this likeness to Christ is not the result of a short period of concentrated effort in the spiritual life: there is only one way of acquiring it—through grace, after years of self-denial.

The priest should offer himself as a victim together with Christ at the moment of consecration and when he recites the words: "Through him, with him and in him is all honour and glory to you, God."<sup>2</sup> The priest who fails to grasp this teaching in any practical form is wasting much of his time, he is being deceived in numerous ways and understands nothing of the profoundness of the mystery of the redemptive Incarnation. He is building on sand and, in the words of St. Peter, "he is no better than a blind man feeling his way about; his old sins have been purged away, and he had forgotten it" (2 Pet. i, 9); that is, he forgets it was only through the cross of Christ that he was purified from his guilt. "The priest only reaches the summit of his priesthood in the state of victim whereby he is conformed to Christ. Without this spirit of immolation, if he does not carry his cross, the priest fails to understand the full import of his vocation."<sup>3</sup> He cannot say the offertory prayer with any depth of meaning: "Receive holy Father this unblemished sacrificial offering . . . for my countless sins, offences and neglects."<sup>4</sup>

Neither can he say with sincerity the prayer at the end of the Canon: "To us also thy sinful servants, who put our trust in thy countless acts of mercy, deign to grant some share and fellowship with thy holy Apostles and martyrs. . . . Into their company we pray thee to admit us, not weighing our deserts, but freely granting us forgiveness . . ."

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Fr. Giraud, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 405-407, 411-414.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Fr. Giraud, *op. cit.*, II, p. 414.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 414.

In contrast, priests who have taken more than a mere speculative interest in this teaching and have become both priests and victims have met with enormous success in their ministry.<sup>1</sup> This truth cannot be repeated too often since the modern world has little or no time for the cross, and our own human nature encourages us to avoid it.

St. Gregory the Great (*Homil. xxxii, 2*) says: "Unless a man ceases through humility to think of himself, he never approaches the Being who is above himself; unless he knows how to sacrifice what he is, he cannot grasp what is beyond himself." Without the sacrifice of self no man can possibly attain to a close union with Christ. His love for the Saviour must become so intense that its ardent strength destroys the main obstacle to union—his inordinate love of self. The German mystic Tauler was most insistent on that point. But the Old Testament had already implied the same, when setting out the rite to be followed in the sacrifice of a holocaust: "This is the rule which governs burnt-sacrifice. It is to be burnt on the altar all night till morning comes, with the altar's own fire. . . . The fire on the altar must burn continually; each morning the priest will feed it with fresh logs", in order that the victim should be altogether destroyed by the fire, and the smell of its burning would rise towards God.<sup>2</sup> The outward sacrifice was intended to signify the inward sacrifice of reparative worship, petition, and thanksgiving. This was certainly true of Christ's shedding of blood in the sacrifice on Calvary and it is no less true of the bloodless immolation in the Mass. Joined to this holocaust are all the saintly priests whose lives are, so to speak, a perpetual sacrifice. St. Augustine writes: "There is no need to look outside of yourself for a sheep to offer to God: you have within yourself that which you can kill."<sup>3</sup> The victim is always to be found within yourself.

#### *Different degrees of union with Christ the victim*

The desired union between the priest and Christ the victim varies according as the priest has reached the spiritual age of

<sup>1</sup> Fr. Giraud gives ample proof of this in his book *Prêtre et hostie*, I, pp. 573–593. Refer also to the works of St. Paul of the Cross, the founder of the Passionists.

<sup>2</sup> Leviticus vi, 8 and 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Enarr. in Ps. L*, n. 21.

beginners, of proficients, or of the perfect. If he is a beginner, his life should already exemplify the words of St. Paul: "Those who belong to Christ have crucified nature, with all its passions, all its impulses" (*Gal. v, 24*); and: "If you mortify the ways of nature through the power of the Spirit, you will have life" (*Rom. viii, 13*). This should be true even of the perfect, because in the present life, though avarice can completely destroy charity which is lost through any mortal sin, charity never completely destroys avarice—our inordinate love of self—which finds a willing accomplice both in the world and in the devil. Therefore St. Thomas says (*Summa IIIa*, q. 84, a. 8): "The internal spirit of penitence whereby we are sorry for sin committed must endure until the end of our life." Only in this way can we preserve ourselves against committing sin in the future. "Internal penitence has its place even in the proficient and in the perfect" (*ibid., ad 2*). St. Paul exhorts the Christians in Rome (*Rom. xii, 1*): "And now brethren I appeal to you by God's mercies to offer up your bodies as a living sacrifice, consecrated to God and worthy of his acceptance; this is the worship due from you as rational creatures."

More especially should the priest offer himself as a victim when God gives him a special cross to bear, such as he laid on the shoulders of Christ. An occasion in question would be a time of persecution when God makes an extraordinary intervention in order to consecrate his priest more fully, so that he becomes at the same time a perfect victim. Also regarded as crosses are the various trials of life—for example, aridity of mind or heart, periods when the soul is incapable of prayer, temptations against chastity or patience or faith or hope or charity, mental desolations which can become a spiritual agony in the night of the soul described by St. John of the Cross. Very often these spiritual trials are accompanied by physical trials—bodily infirmity and sickness—and also by the desertion of friends, loss of good repute, opposition, persecution, contempt, poverty. God either deliberately wills or at least permits these trials for a greater good, as David well understood when he was cursed by Semei: he said to his servants: "Let him (Semei) curse as he will; the Lord has bidden him curse David, and who shall call him to question for doing it?" (*II Kings xvi, 10*). And thus the king made reparation for his sins.

A cross carried cheerfully is a great blessing from God; it is a sign of our predestination, since it is the cross which makes us like to Christ. "If we are his children, then we are his heirs too; heirs of God, sharing the inheritance of Christ; only we must share his sufferings, if we are to share his glory" (Rom. viii, 17). The author of the *Imitation of Christ* writes (bk. ii, c. 12): "In the cross is salvation; in the cross is life; in the cross is protection from enemies . . . in the cross is height of virtue; in the cross is perfection of sanctity." So the cross is far more necessary for us than we normally think. St. Paul reiterates the truth in his second Epistle to Timothy (iii, 12): "And indeed, all those who are resolved to live a holy life in Christ Jesus will meet with persecution." St. Augustine in the course of his commentary on the 55th Psalm says: "If therefore you do not suffer any persecution for Christ's sake, see whether you may not yet have begun to live holily in Christ. When you begin to live in this way, you have entered the winepress of suffering; prepare yourself for the pressings, but take care not to be so spiritually dry that nothing comes forth from the pressing."

The saints lived up to this teaching—especially St. Paul of the Cross, who at the age of thirty had already reached the union of transformation into Christ, but he had still to found the Order of Passionists, who were to dedicate themselves to a life of reparation, and he did not die until he was eighty-one. So for forty-five years he was carrying a cross so heavy that it became a common saying in Rome: "Deliver us, Lord, from the way of Paul." But never for one moment did he lose his charity and meekness towards everyone.

#### *The teaching of St. Paul*

The fruitfulness of the cross in the priestly ministry is admirably described by St. Paul. During these times of affliction, humiliation and death, not only is the sufferer made like to Christ but he is suffering also for the whole Church. "I am glad of my sufferings on your behalf, as, in this mortal frame of mine, I help to pay off the debt which the afflictions of Christ leave still to be paid, for the sake of his body, the Church" (Coloss. i, 24). This is well explained by St. Thomas in his commentary on that Epistle: "On the surface, these words are capable

of a false interpretation. They could be taken to mean that the Passion of Christ was insufficient for the redemption of the world and that the sufferings of the saints have been added to make it complete. This is heretical, because the blood of Christ is sufficient for the redemption of many worlds. 'He, in his own person, is the atonement made for our sins, and not only for ours, but for the sins of the whole world' (I John ii, 2). But it is essential to understand that Christ and the Church are one mystical body of which Christ is the head and the just are the body; everyone who has been justified is, so to say, a member of this head. Now just as God has predestined the number of the elect, so also he has foreordained the amount of merit there must be throughout the whole Church, both in the head and in the members. And amongst these merits are numbered the sufferings of the saints. The merits of Christ as head are, indeed, infinite but every saint contributes his own particular amount of merit. And so St. Paul says: I help to pay off the debt still to be paid . . . that is, I contribute my own share. . . . Likewise do all the saints suffer for the Church, which is strengthened by their example." St. Augustine comments in a similar vein on Psalm LXI, n. 4.

The individual's cross is, as it were, the extension of Christ's Passion and the means of applying the merits of Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary: she herself merited (*de congruo*) with Christ the redemption of the human race and not merely its application.

St. Paul expresses this very vividly in his Epistle to the Galatians (ii, 19): "With Christ I hang upon the cross, and yet I am alive; or rather, not I; it is Christ that lives in me." And St. Thomas comments: "The old habit of sin is taken away by the cross of Christ and the new habit of the spiritual life is conferred . . . together with the strength to perform good actions." Then it is that the words of Christ are amply fulfilled in the priest: "It was not you that chose me, it was I that chose you. The task I have appointed you is to go out and bear fruit, fruit which will endure" (John xv, 16).

*Conclusion.* It should now be evident that the priest must be a victim in order to be like Christ and in order to labour according to his capacity for the salvation of souls with the same means as Christ himself used. Therefore every priest from the day of his

ordination onwards must accept generously all the crosses marked out for him from all eternity by the providence of God, whether they be directly willed or merely permitted, so that his work of saving souls may be fruitful and that he may fully respond to his own individual vocation as determined by God. Priests are the chosen section of Christ's people, the section which has a special duty of conforming to Christ as priest and victim.

*A practical application of this doctrine to the priest's life*

The characteristic virtue of a victim is patience inspired by love of God. As St. Thomas points out, it is far more difficult to bear with suffering for some time than to attack an enemy in a moment of daring. Now the priest has to be extremely patient even with those who are most troublesome and with those who are down and out, doing for them all that he can to preserve them from despair and to save their souls. Even when obstacles are put in the way of good results from his apostolate, he must still be patient and pray much. Neither must his patience diminish when his capabilities seem to be out of all proportion with the work he has to do. The Apostles themselves were not blind to their limitations, but with the help of God's grace they laboured for the conversion of the world, even to the point of martyrdom.

The venerable Father Chevrier, a friend of St. John Vianney, wrote out the following scheme for his followers to remember.

*The priest, another Christ*

*The Crib*

*Poverty*

The priest must be—

poor in his dwelling in clothing in food in his household	humble in spirit and heart before God, men, and himself
---	---

The greater the poverty of a priest and the more humble he is, the greater the glory he receives from God, and the more useful he is to his neighbour.  
The priest is a man stripped of everything.

*Calvary*

*Death to himself*

The priest must—

die to his body to his own mind, to his will, his rep- utation, his fam- ily, and the world	immolate him- self through silence, prayer, work, penance, suffer- ing, death
--	---

The more a priest dies in this way, the more life does he possess himself and the more he gives to others.  
The priest is a crucified man.

*The Tabernacle*

*Charity*

The priest must—

give his body his mind his time his possessions, his health, his life	give life to others by his faith by his teaching by his words by his prayer, his faculties, and example
---	---

The priest should be like nourishing food to be eaten by everyone.  
The priest is a man to whom others look for their food and sustenance.

Fr. Chevrier gathered together, in Lyons, large numbers of children who had been abandoned by their parents, and made excellent Christians of many of them. He laid down three conditions for attendance at his catechism class: "to know nothing, to possess nothing, to be worth nothing." And, through the grace of God, this priest succeeded on several occasions in bringing about a complete reformation of their character.<sup>1</sup>

*Its practical application to-day*

There are at present in the world many people who wish to suppress all forms of mortification, penance, and reparation; they are anxious to destroy the cross and the spirit of sacrifice as being opposed to the modern spirit of so-called liberty or licence and uncontrolled pleasure.

Consequently their lives have become completely barren, because no one has ever been known to scale great heights without a spirit of sacrifice. The modern spirit of unbridled pleasure leads inevitably to destruction, as is only too evident from the past two wars. No genuine peace has resulted, precisely because men have refused to see the meaning of divine chastisements and to return to a life which is both naturally upright and Christian. And so the Holy Ghost has implanted in many souls the seeds of genuine and fruitful reparation.

In view of this widespread sterility in human endeavour many would-be reformers are asserting that what is needed is a new approach to the priestly and religious life, in order to adapt

<sup>1</sup> A similar example is given in *Vita R. mi D. Giuseppe Marella*, of Turin, bishop of Acqui, written by Fr. Angelo Rainero, 1937. Pius IX spoke of him as "an illustrious gem" in the Church. Read what is said of his inexhaustible patience, p. 274 sq.

them to the needs of the modern era. So far as the religious life is concerned, they are of the opinion that its austerity ought to be mitigated since it is now out of date: time devoted to prayer should be cut down to leave more time for external activities. They would also adapt the priestly life to the spirit of the times: to them it seems no longer suitable for priests to wear a special dress or the tonsure or any outward sign of their priesthood, or even to recite the breviary—perhaps even celibacy has become outmoded—and so on.

Such has been the attitude adopted by many Protestants, and it is of interest to remember that Luther in cutting himself off from the Church immediately renounced the three religious vows. But surely a more fitting approach would be the following: "The dearth of achievement in recent apostolic work has been due to the fact that many priests and religious have been wanting in a supernatural faith sufficiently strong, active, deep, and infectious. Therefore they have not been able to communicate it to a Christian people distracted by pernicious errors. This modern sterility is due also to the fickle confidence of many priests in divine help, and to their lack of ardent charity—which must be the heart and soul of any apostolate. And why has their enthusiasm for the glory of God and the salvation of souls waned? For want of the spirit of sacrifice. The priest has failed to recognize that he must be a victim in union with Christ, and that he cannot save souls except through the same means as Christ himself used. It is only this spirit of sacrifice which can rectify disorder in the soul of a priest or religious, and thus make way for a genuine charity bringing in its train peace and joy, which spread themselves to other souls. Take away mortification and you immediately take away joy, because once the affections of man are allowed to settle on things of sense they can no longer be raised to God and the supernatural."

There is certainly no need to remodel the priestly and religious lives and thus imitate the modernist renovation of dogma.

But what is required is a careful study of the actions and ambitions of the saints, whether they were founders of Orders or excellent secular priests; and this study must be undertaken not in any mere historical or theoretical frame of mind but

from a practical point of view. Neither must we neglect the perennial teaching of the Church and the Popes about the religious life and the priestly life, which we find contained in the *Enchiridion* for the training of clerics. We will then discover the real changes that have to be made, in a spirit of faith, trust in God, and self-diffusive charity. Pius X spoke about the spirit of sacrifice in his *Letter to Catholic Priests*:<sup>1</sup> "We do not discharge the priestly office in our own name but in the name of Jesus Christ. St. Paul says: 'That is how we ought to be regarded, as Christ's servants, and stewards of God's mysteries' (I Cor. iv, 1); 'We are Christ's ambassadors, then' (II Cor. v, 20). Because of this, Christ has enrolled us not as servants but as friends: 'I do not speak of you any more as my servants; a servant is one who does not understand what his master is about, whereas I have made known to you all that my Father has told me; and so I have called you my friends. . . . It was I that chose you, and the task I have appointed you is to go out and bear fruit' (John xv, 15, 16). We priests, as Christ's representatives, must bear him in ourselves, and, as his ambassadors, we must go wherever he wills. As his friends, we must let that mind be in us which was in Jesus Christ, 'holy, innocent, and undefiled', since the sure and only sign of true friendship is to will and not to will the same thing. As his ambassadors, we must win men over to belief in his teaching and law, we ourselves setting the example in observing them. Moreover, as sharing his power to free the souls of men from the bonds of sin, we must strive with all the means in our power to avoid being caught in the same fetters. But above all, as his ministers possessing unending power to renew the unparalleled sacrifice of the Mass for the life of the world, we are bound to possess that spirit of Christ which led him to offer himself on the altar of the cross as an unblemished victim."<sup>2</sup>

Likewise Pius XI in his encyclicals *Ad Catholici sacerdotii fastigium*, 20th December, 1935, and *Caritate Christi compulsi*, 1932, pointed out that if the faithful were to possess the necessary zeal for God's glory and the salvation of souls, they must do penance not only for themselves but for all sinners, in imitation

<sup>1</sup> *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 1908, pp. 555-577.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Catholic priests written by His Holiness Pope Pius X on the occasion of the golden jubilee of his priesthood: *Haerent animo; Acta Ap. Sedis*, 1908, pp. 557-558.

of the saints who were following the example set by Christ, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

If this is the advice given by Pius XI for the promotion of zeal in the general body of the faithful, surely it holds with even greater force for priestly zeal.

If anyone asks for dogmatic proof that Christ offers not only himself but also his mystical body in the Mass, it is to be found in the prayer which Christ offered previous to the sacrifice of the Cross—which in its essential aspects continues in the Mass: "Holy Father, keep them true to thy name, thy gift to me, that they may be one, as we are one. . . . Keep them holy, then, through the truth . . . that they may all be one . . . and so they may be perfectly made one." (Cf. John xvii.) See also 1 Peter ii, 5 sq; Romans xii, 1-2; and the *Imitation of Christ*, bk. iv, c. 8 and 9.

Margherita, the mother of Don Bosco, said to her son on the day of his first Mass: "To become a priest is to commence a life of suffering."

#### *The vow of victim*

Although we have stated that in order to attain to perfection the priest must offer himself daily in union with Christ as a victim, willingly accepting all the afflictions permitted by Providence, we have not been considering the *vow* of victim. This highly meritorious vow has been made by many generous souls specially inspired by the Holy Ghost to offer themselves either to the Divine Justice or to the Merciful Love of God, in order to accept all the sufferings which Almighty God will deem suitable for making reparation for sinners and for obtaining their conversion—to some extent like St. John of the Cross. In consequence, these souls are often visited with grievous sufferings, sicknesses, and persecution. Hence this vow must never be made except under a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost; otherwise there is the danger of undertaking an extremely painful way of life to which one has no vocation, and so of being unable to bear all the subsequent afflictions. That is the natural result of presumption in making the vow.

On the other hand, if God sees that a person will endure with consummate patience sufferings that are to come his way—for instance, as a result of a very painful illness—he will inspire

such a soul to make a special dedication of itself to God as a victim of love. The soul's patience will then be all the more meritorious in virtue of this vow and all the more fruitful for the conversion of sinners.<sup>1</sup>

But even without making a vow in the strict sense of the word

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Fr. S. M. Giraud, *Prêtre et hostie*, where he discusses this vow of victim; also his book on the religious life, *De l'esprit et de la vie de sacrifice dans l'état religieux*, 4e éd., Lyons, 1879, pp. 20-81, especially the following chapters—

Bk. I, c. 8: "Various degrees of union with Jesus Victim"; c. 9: "Union with Jesus in his act of offering"; c. 10: ". . . in his act of immolation"; c. 12: "Mary's maternal help."

*The content of this vow of victim.* The person making the vow promises God to accept (or, not to refuse deliberately and voluntarily) any sacrifice great or small, physical or spiritual—for example, loss of sense consolation in prayer, affecting his property or his reputation, whenever God's will is sufficiently clear in these matters. The divine will is usually revealed through events or misfortunes which are evidently part of the Providential plan—for instance, the death of one's father or mother or brother or sister or friend—and also, through the wishes of superiors who rule in the place of God.

But it must not be imagined that the vow dispenses with the virtue of prudence. Without going back on one's word, one can still take reasonable and prudent precautions to ward off possible evils.

The individual making the vow promises God that he will never deliberately and willingly regret having taken this step, no matter what the consequences may be. Herein lies the heroic nature of the vow. And if at any time he does give way with full deliberation and consent to a feeling of regret, he commits grievous sin—although if this momentary lapse occurs without his full consent he is excused from mortal sin. Therefore the vow is of a serious and lofty nature and is not to be made without a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

At the same time certain conditions may be attached to this solemn engagement with Christ the victim; it can be restricted to a period of a few months or, since it is a free act, its content may be limited, with permission from the spiritual director—for instance, the vow can be made with the proviso that no suffering is caused to one's parents or fellow religious in consequence of the vow.

Thus the implications of the vow make it obvious that it must never be made without the express permission of a prudent spiritual director. And if the person desiring to make the vow is a member of some religious community, permission must also be obtained from the superior—at least to this extent, that the superior does not forbid the vow being made. That is the normal rule for vows made by religious; cf. Billuart, *De virtute religionis, de voto (qui possint vovere)*.

From what we have been saying it follows that once the vow is made and the rules of prudence observed it would be a mortal sin to refuse voluntarily any sacrifice which would have beneficial results or would be the means of avoiding some great evil. If, however, the refusal were not fully deliberate or the content of the vow of little importance, the sin would be venial.

What should be the nature of the perfection for which the person under the vow must strive? He must try to perform all his actions—even the most commonplace—after the manner of Christ the victim. He must aim at being prompt in the acceptance of every sacrifice. Consequently, he has to regard himself as consecrated to the glory of God in order to make satisfaction—so far as in him lies—for offences committed against God. This entails the peak of charity, of all the virtues and of all the gifts; such perfection can only be found in the mystical life. And so anyone entering upon this solemn engagement is bound to tend continually towards that state of internal and external perfection befitting a genuine victim. The motto of his life must be: "Bear the burden of one another's failings; then you will be fulfilling the law of Christ" (Gal. vi, 2).

it still remains possible to offer oneself to the Merciful Love of God by adopting the formula composed by St. Thérèse of Lisieux and approved by the Sacred Penitentiary, 31st July, 1923. A plenary indulgence may be gained each month by those who recite it daily.

"To live in an act of perfect love, *I offer myself as a burnt-offering to Your Merciful Love*, calling upon you to consume me every instant, while You let the floods of infinite tenderness pent up within You flow into my soul, so that I may become Martyr to Your Love, O my God! . . .

"When that martyrdom has prepared me to appear before You, may it cause me to die, and may my soul hurl itself in that instant into the eternal embrace of Your Merciful Love. . . .

"At every heartbeat, O my Beloved, I wish to renew this offering an infinite number of times, till the shadows retire and I can tell You my Love over again, looking upon You face to face eternally."<sup>1</sup>

We can also ask Our Lady to offer us each day to her Son, in the sure hope that her motherly prudence will not allow us to be visited by sufferings which we could not endure, even though aided by grace. At the same time we will ask her not to restrain her zeal in making this offering, so that we may give to God whatever he expects from us while we are on earth. Such an offering made through the intercession of God's mother will not be wanting in prudence or in generosity. Furthermore, it is not a vow which binds under sin; it is a simple offering, somewhat equivalent in practice to the vow of doing what is more perfect for us.

It is therefore undeniable that every priest has a duty of becoming a victim in his own individual way in order to be another Christ. On this depends the fruitfulness or failure of his ministry—a fact abundantly proved as true during recent years in concentration camps, where priests who generously accepted for Christ and for souls all the opposition and punishment they experienced during their confinement were rewarded by a most fruitful ministry.

<sup>1</sup> Reproduced by kind permission of the publishers from *The Collected Letters of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux* (English tr. by F. J. Sheed, Sheed and Ward, London, 1949).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE PRIEST'S COMMUNION

#### *The dogmatic teaching of the Church*

HOLY Communion must of necessity be received by all adults in virtue of the divine command: "You can have no life in yourselves, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood" (John vi, 54). There is also the precept of the Church (Denz. 437, 1205 sq).

Furthermore, St. Thomas maintains (*Summa*, IIIa, q. 73, a. 3) that Holy Communion is necessary for salvation independently of the divine command, for the Eucharist is in itself an essential means of sanctification, "of completing the spiritual life, and thus it is the end of all the other sacraments" in so far as of its very nature it increases charity in our souls and unites us to Christ the Saviour. "You can have no life in yourselves, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood" (John vi, 54). Therefore, according to St. Thomas, all the faithful without exception must receive the effect of Holy Communion by an implicit desire at least. The grace of Baptism is ordered to this effect in the same way as a child tends towards manhood. But if this is true for all the faithful in general, with even greater reason is it true for the priest.

Moreover, the celebrant's Communion is required for the completion of the sacrifice of the Mass; Christ is present under the species of the eucharistic sacrifice after the manner of food and drink, and so is meant to be consumed.

Finally, the priest must receive Communion under both species: "So far as the sacrament itself is concerned it is most fitting that both the body and the blood be received since the perfection of the sacrament rests in both, and therefore, because it is the priest's duty both to consecrate and to complete the sacrament, he should never receive the body of Christ without the blood" (*Summa*, IIIa, q. 80, a. 12; cf. also ad 1). The priest has a divine obligation in this respect.

St. Thomas continues in the article just quoted: "On the part of the communicants extreme reverence and caution are

necessary to prevent anything happening which would not be fitting for so great a sacrament. This is most likely to occur in the drinking of the blood which might easily be spilt, if there were any carelessness in receiving it. And because the Christian community has increased . . . it is a prudent custom for the blood to be received by the priest alone and not by the people."

Ibid. ad. 3: "Nothing is lost by this (that is, by the body being received by the people without the blood): because the priest both offers and receives the blood in the name of all, and the whole Christ is present under either species." Under the species of bread there is also present, by concomitance, the precious blood. Thus the faithful are not deprived of any notable grace, and a fervent Communion under one species is far more fruitful than a tepid Communion received under both species.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Holy Communion foreshadowed in the sacrifices of the Old Testament*

In these sacrifices—with the exception of the burnt-offering—the priest used to consume a part of the victim after it had been offered and immolated, sacrifice being regarded as a divine banquet at which God consented to dine with his creatures. This Communion in the Old Testament was instituted by God; in Ezechiel xliv, 28–30, we read of the Levites: "And for the priestly tribe, it must have no patrimony assigned to it; I am their patrimony, nor needs he portion, whose portion is his God. Bloodless offering they shall eat, and the victim that is offered for a fault or a wrong done . . . theirs the first of all first-fruits and the residue of all you offer." See also Deut. xviii, 1; Num. xvii, 20; Eccles. xlv, 26. The Levites and priests were to live solely on the victims offered in sacrifice. And since these victims were types of the Lamb who would take away the sins of the world, they had to be eaten in a spirit of faith and reverence and not as ordinary food.<sup>2</sup>

We are apt to think of the priests of the Old Testament as men of moderate virtue, but, in practice, there were to be

<sup>1</sup> I have already discussed this question at length in my work *De Eucharistia*, 1943, Turin, p. 239 sq.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, art. "Prêtre," col. 646 sq., under the headings "fonction", "consecration", "onction", "fonctions dans le Temple." Also J. M. Vosté, *Studia Paulina*, II, p. 752, 3°.

found amongst them individuals of outstanding virtue, piety, and zeal for the glory of God—for instance, Phinees, Jeremias, Ezechiel (who belonged to the priestly race), Onias, and many others. Read what is recorded of Simon and his fellow priests in Eccles., c. 50. Jeremias said of himself (xi, 19): "Hitherto, I had been unsuspecting as a tame lamb led off to the slaughter-house", to sacrifice. These priests of the Old Testament were called to a life of holiness, for it is written in Lev. xi, 44: "You must be set apart, the servants of a God who is set apart. Do not contaminate yourselves. . . . I am set apart and you must be set apart like me." Also Lev. xix, 2, where are set down the duties of a priest in matters of worship and justice; he must also be merciful towards the poor, and so forth.

If the priests of the Old Testament were set apart for holiness, so also with even greater reason are the priests of Christ, who are nourished each day not by figurative victims but by the Lamb of God himself who takes away the sin of the world.

#### *The priest's Communion as a means of sharing in the inner life of Christ, priest and victim*

In Holy Communion Christ is not assimilated to the priest, but the priest is assimilated to Christ. So, if the priests of the former dispensation had to receive a portion of the victim offered to God in a spirit of faith and reverence, our reception of the body of Christ ought to be marked by an even greater faith and reverence. The Eucharistic mystery is thus completed by Holy Communion in which we are united to Christ as victim rather than as priest. Hence, by his Communion, the priest should be conformed to Christ the victim offered and received by both celebrant and faithful.

At that moment especially should the words of St. Paul be verified (Rom. xii, 1): "And now, brethren, I appeal to you by God's mercies to offer up your bodies as a living sacrifice, consecrated to God and worthy of his acceptance; this is the worship due from you as rational creatures." This is sometimes fulfilled by the priest offering the pain caused to him by calumny.

In Holy Communion there is a meeting of intellects, Christ's lucid intellect and our own obscured and confused; a meeting of wills, Christ's will confirmed in goodness and our

own wavering and volatile; a meeting of sense powers, Christ's faculties detached from all that is sinful and our own so often disordered and earthy.

#### *Spiritual fervour in Holy Communion*

In normal circumstances the sacrament of the Eucharist not only preserves but also increases our charity together with the infused virtues and the seven gifts. For that reason each Communion ought to be more fervent than the preceding one; if sensible fervour does not increase, at least there should be greater substantial fervour of the will. Each Communion should also prepare us to receive the sacrament with even greater love on the following day. As the speed of a moving body increases the nearer it approaches its centre of attraction, so should our progress towards God follow the same law of acceleration.

Holy Communion is an incentive to greater generosity. St. Thomas in commenting on the words of St. Paul: "Let us keep one another in mind, always ready with incitements to charity . . . all the more, as you see the great day drawing nearer" (Heb. x, 25), says: "Any natural movement increases in speed the nearer it approaches its completion. The contrary is true of enforced movement. Now grace follows the behaviour of natural movement. Therefore those who enjoy the supernatural life ought to increase in grace the nearer they approach their end."

And where else should we expect to find verified the words heard by St. Augustine, if not in the Communion of a priest: "Grow and you will feed on me, for I am the food of grown men. I shall not be changed into you like that which feeds your body, but you will be changed into me." Thus we find the saints reaching the peak of their spiritual life in their later years on the eve of their eternal youth.

#### *The testimony of the Liturgy, as presented by Fr. Olier<sup>1</sup>*

Fr. Olier, the founder of Saint Sulpice, has this to say about the priest's act of receiving Holy Communion: "In receiving the Eucharist the priest should identify himself with the host by sharing in the inner life of Christ the Victim, because nothing is more closely united to ourselves than the food which we eat

(although in Holy Communion we do not assimilate the eucharistic food into our own substance: we in some sense are changed into it)." Fr. Olier then concludes: "Every priest should be a victim or a genuine host, by accepting whatever God has willed or permitted for his sanctification: in this way he is assimilated to Christ and works with him, in him, and through him, for the saving of souls."

In the same chapter is also contained this advice: "Our Saviour by making use of bread and wine in Holy Communion wishes to show that the priest and the host must be one and the same, that all priests should be real victims, and that just as they are God's priests only in and by Jesus Christ whose spirit dwells within them, so also must they become victims in union with him and always continue in that state, if they want to be genuine priests like himself."<sup>1</sup>

The priest's Communion should be looked upon as the end of the priestly life, a union with Christ priest and victim which becomes more and more intimate every day. It must be his centre of rest, so to speak, and the source of his priestly charity towards God and souls.

#### *Spiritual Communion*

The priest ought to renew his spiritual communion frequently during the course of the day, in order to renew the effect of his sacramental Communion. It can be made, for example, before every meal by recalling to mind the words of Christ: "My meat is to do the will of him who sent me" (John iv, 34); or the words of St. Paul: "For me, life means Christ; death is a prize to be won" (Phil. i, 21). St. Thomas, when commenting on this last passage, points out that while the hunter lives for the chase, the soldier for his military duties, and the student for his study, the Christian lives for Christ in so far as he is the continual object of his faith which should be gaining in vitality and perception day by day, and also the object of his hope and love which should increase until the moment of his death.

The priest could use for his spiritual communion the words of the 72nd Psalm: "What else does heaven hold for me, but thyself? What pleasure should I find in all thy gifts on earth?

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 4.

<sup>1</sup> *Traité des Saints Ordres*, III Partie, c. 4.

This frame, this earthly being of mine must come to an end; still God will comfort my heart, God will be, eternally, my inheritance. . . . I know no other content but clinging to God, putting my trust in the Lord, my Master; within the gates of royal Sion I will be the herald of thy praise." Nowhere in the Old Testament is there a finer expression of the soul's longing for God. But now, in the present dispensation, a spiritual communion with God could often be made by pronouncing fervently the name of Jesus, in a spirit of faith, hope, and charity which is always growing stronger.

Day and night, in time of temptation and in time of consolation, the good priest should find it almost second nature to raise his mind and heart to Christ the priest and victim, and in so doing he would be frequently renewing his spiritual communion. He would then be sharing in the contemplative prayer of Christ, in his wisdom, his intelligence, his prudence, his ardent love for God the Father and the souls which need saving.<sup>1</sup> Such a priest would certainly arrive at the stage of contemplation and intimate union with God which is the normal preparation for eternal life and the beginning, so to say, of future happiness. Cf. St. Thomas, Summa, Ia IIae, q. 69, a. 2.

Similarly, the priest would be living in almost uninterrupted communion with the different virtues of Christ, according as circumstances required their imitation: he would be sharing in Christ's humility, meekness, patience, poverty, self-denial, devotion for his Father, and zeal for souls.

The genuine minister of Christ ardently desires to be a victim offered by the high priest by immolating and ridding himself of all his inordinate tendencies, judgments, and schemes. Having nothing, yet possessing all things.

Happy the priest who keeps nothing for himself but surrenders himself entirely to the high priest; who allows his thoughts to be inspired and guided by Christ the victim who comes to take complete possession of his soul. The priest who is thus set apart as a victim is the disciple and intimate friend of Christ, the perfect apostle, like St. John the Evangelist or St. Paul, although the comparison must not be pressed too far. Likewise, his familiarity with Our Blessed Lady will grow:

<sup>1</sup> Giraud, *op. cit.*, I, 302.

her unique vocation of Mother of God and universal mediatrix and co-redemptrix is vastly superior to that of the priest, because it is a greater dignity to give Christ his human nature and to offer his sacrificial shedding of blood than to make his body present on the altar and to offer the bloodless immolation in the Mass.

St. Alphonsus thinks it not improbable that more grace is given in Holy Communion under both species, and all theologians agree that if the ardour of charity is increased by receiving the second species, then greater grace is conferred accidentally by reason of the better disposition.<sup>1</sup> Therefore a layman who wants to become a priest in order to communicate under both species so as to receive this greater grace is not to be dissuaded.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Giraud, *op. cit.*, I, 339, and St. Alphonsus, *Theol. mor.*, lib. VI, tract. III, n. 28.

## CHAPTER FIVE

THE FOUR ENDS OF SACRIFICE AND  
PRIESTLY PERFECTION<sup>1</sup>

THIS chapter is based to a large extent on the teaching of Blessed Peter Julian Eymard, founder of the Congregation of the Fathers of the Blessed Sacrament, who devoted much of his writings to a discussion of this particular question. He was specially inspired by God to establish for his own religious and for the faithful in general an almost continual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. From the outset he was afflicted with trials. He had but one companion who, as soon as he realized that no other vocations were forthcoming, left his friend with no intention of returning. Blessed Peter Eymard remained on his knees before the Blessed Sacrament and was inspired by God to say: "Lord, I will not rise unless my friend returns." Some hours later his friend did return, to be followed later on by many other fine vocations. To-day this Congregation has spread throughout Europe and the two Americas, and is meeting with striking success.<sup>2</sup>

Before studying the teaching of Blessed Peter Eymard we must first remind ourselves of the general teaching concerning eucharistic worship and the interior life of all the faithful.

*Eucharistic worship and the interior life*

It is true for all Christians that the Eucharist is the divine sustenance of their interior life, for it nourishes their faith, hope, charity, religion, and all the other virtues.

The Eucharist nourishes our faith since it is the crowning mystery of faith, presupposing the mystery of the redemptive Incarnation of the Son of God, the mystery of the Trinity, and the mystery of man's elevation to the life of grace; it is also the

<sup>1</sup> This question has already been discussed in my earlier work *De sanctificatione sacerdotum secundum exigentias temporis nostri*, but I am here considering it from the point of view of the priest's union with Christ, priest and victim.

<sup>2</sup> I have based my summary of the teaching of Blessed Peter Julian Eymard on his book *Meditationes pro exercitu spiritualibus*, Turin, new edition, 1934—especially on the third volume.

pledge of eternal life. In consequence, a single eucharistic miracle which sets its seal on the truth of this sacrament confirms at the same time both the truth of all the other mysteries which it presupposes and also the validity of the other sacraments which are ordered to the reception of the Eucharist. This would apply in particular to the validity of all the priestly ordinations and episcopal consecrations which have taken place without interruption since Christ's institution of the Eucharist and the priesthood of the New Law.

Similarly, the virtue of hope is nourished by the Eucharist since hope relies on the help of divine grace. Now the Eucharist contains not only grace but also the author of grace—hence its pre-eminence above all other sacraments.

The Eucharist nourishes also the virtue of charity, in so far as Holy Communion joins us to Christ and increases our charity towards God and our neighbour—a charity which is not mere sentiment, but is active and effective. The Eucharist is the bond of charity uniting together at the same divine banquet the members of every Christian family, the poor and the rich, the learned and the ignorant, all Christians throughout the world. And so in Holy Communion are verified the two principles: goodness is essentially diffusive, and, the loftier its nature, so much the more completely and abundantly does it give itself to others. Material goods cannot be completely possessed by several individuals at the same time, but spiritual goods can. In fact, they are then more completely possessed by each of the individuals, so that if anyone wished to reserve them exclusively for himself, he would thereby lose both charity and the spiritual goods. For that reason, everyone can possess at the same time the same truth, the same virtue, the same Christ present in the Eucharist after the manner of a substance, the same God hidden in our souls and clearly revealed in heaven.

Finally, the Eucharist nourishes the virtue of religion, because the supreme act of religion is the act of sacrifice, an act which is both internal, external, and public. The eucharistic sacrifice is the sacramental continuation of the sacrifice of the Cross, which is infinite in its value. The principal priest—Christ himself—could not be more closely united either to God or to the people who form his mystical body or to the victim

which is himself. Therefore both victim and principal offerer are of infinite value.

### *The Priest and the Eucharist<sup>1</sup>*

- Summary.* (1) The priesthood and the spirit of sacrifice.  
 (2) The four ends of sacrifice; Christ's interior life in the Eucharist, a model of the principal virtues of charity, religion, humility, poverty; belief in the Eucharist; confidence; charity; reparative charity in imitation of Christ the victim; Litany of the Eucharistic Heart.  
 (3) Conclusion. The Eucharist and priestly perfection; the Eucharistic vocation.

### *The priesthood and the spirit of sacrifice*

It is the office of a priest to offer the bloodless sacrifice of infinite worth, to absolve sinners and thus regenerate in them the life of grace, to lead them to eternal life, and—especially—to preach the Gospel to the poor. For this he needs purity, humility, meekness, effective charity—all of which he acquires for the glory of God and the saving of souls. He should imitate the example of the Apostles, who stated as their reason for ordaining deacons to look after the works of mercy: "We devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of preaching" (Acts vi, 4). Otherwise there will be plenty of outward activity but with little to show for it; tremendous strides but not in the right direction. Furthermore, the cry of St. John the Baptist should find an echo in the life of every priest: "He must become more and more, I must become less and less."

To this end he should live according to the spirit of Christ: "A man who unites himself to the Lord becomes one spirit with him" (I Cor. vi, 17): "A man cannot belong to Christ unless he has the Spirit of Christ" (Rom. viii, 9). This spirit is one of truth and love and sacrifice: *truth*, for Christ has said: "What I came into the world for is to bear witness of the truth" (John xviii, 37)—"You are the light of the world" (Matt. v, 14)—"You are to be my witnesses" (Acts i, 8); *love*, which manifests itself in meekness: "Learn from me; I am gentle and humble of heart" (Matt. xi, 29), and in zeal which perseveres unto death—"Christ loved me, and gave himself for me"

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Blessed Peter Eymard, *loc. cit.*, vol. III, pp. 43, 82–87, 98–112, 161, 230–232.

(Gal. ii, 20); *sacrifice*, "He is not worthy of me, that loves father or mother more. . . . He is not worthy of me, that does not take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. x, 37, 38). This sacrifice will be rewarded a hundredfold. "Who wins the victory? I will feed him with the hidden manna" (Apoc. ii, 17).

### *The four ends of sacrifice*

The duty of divine worship is fulfilled by the worthy celebration of the sacrifice of the Mass, which should be offered each day with greater faith and hope and charity and fervour of the will, even if sensible fervour is lacking. We also adore God by Holy Communion, by visits to the Blessed Sacrament, by reparative worship, petition, and thanksgiving. It is impossible to find on earth a loftier or holier or more liturgical form of worship than this eucharistic worship, in which the priest is given unrivalled opportunities for cultivating the virtue of belief in Christ hidden under the species of bread and wine, and also the virtues of hope, charity, religion, and humility, together with the corresponding gifts of the Holy Ghost. And by the exercise of these virtues and gifts the priest attains to his perfection.

All priests, no matter how weak or imperfect their spiritual character, can and must desire this perfection so that they may become true adorers of Christ in the Eucharist. We know only too well the tremendous effort that is required to attain to a position of standing in civil society, to become, for example, an advocate, or a doctor, or a professor, or a jurist. But even the most unassuming of priests or the faithful can join in this eucharistic worship, and if they are sincerely humble and devout, they will find themselves making much progress in it: "Come to me, all you that labour and are burdened; I will give you rest" (Matt. xi, 28); "I have come so that they may have life, and have it more abundantly" (John x, 10). Holy Communion gives the soul the strength it needs to avoid sin and to resist the temptations of the flesh and the devil, and also to increase in the love of God "with the love of thy whole heart, and thy whole soul, and thy whole strength, and thy whole mind." This growth in love through Holy Communion and adoration is accompanied by a corresponding growth in the seven gifts and docility to the Holy Ghost.

But there are two aspects of this eucharistic adoration which

deserve special consideration—the four ends of sacrifice, and the virtues which Christ exemplifies in the Eucharist.

The first end of sacrifice is *adoration*; hence the holocaust is the principal sacrifice, since the purpose of its offering is adoration. Throughout the ages men have been quick to forget their obligation to worship God, while readily paying homage to the flesh, to wealth, to the progress of science, to reason, to themselves. They have thus prepared a fruitful soil for the deification of the state or of society, for rationalism which idolizes man's reason—and so on. This neglect of Christ the Saviour is not confined to unbelievers or to the indifferent, but extends to all ungrateful Christians—even, on occasions, to his own ministers who love him not as his sons but as mercenaries, interested only in rewards. They love him not for his own sake but for their own selfish interests. And once deprived of its ruling spirit of charity there can be little adoration.

It is not uncommon in certain parishes to find that the faithful do not go to Mass except on Sunday, and never pay a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. Christ is left alone in the Eucharist for almost the entire week, whereas each day he could be an abundant source of grace. Such parishes present a picture not only of lack of charity but also of lack of hope and faith, which are normally revealed through the virtue of religion that they inspire.

For that reason, adoration of Christ our Saviour present in the Eucharist is to be highly recommended; this adoration will of itself make reparation for much ingratitude, indifference, and lack of care about salvation.

The second end of sacrifice is *thanksgiving* for all God's gifts to man, for the creation of the human race and its elevation to the order of grace and glory, for the redeeming Incarnation, for the institution of the Eucharist and the graces which flow from it, for the innumerable Masses offered and Communions received during the past twenty centuries for the strengthening of souls.

Many people never spare a thought for these divine gifts, and thus they sink to the lowest depths of ingratitude, since these gifts have been so precious and so widespread. Whereas children normally show some sign of gratitude to their parents for what they do, many people never so much as say "thank you"

to their divine benefactor, who is the source of all the gifts in the world.

Since this scourge of ingratitude is not confined to individuals but has affected groups and societies, there must be collective and public thanksgiving. This is the second reason for the Eucharist and forms the basis of its name. In fact, the Eucharist commemorates all the unparalleled gifts which it presupposes—the Incarnation and the Redemption—and administers to us the fruits of redemption. In the words of St. John Fisher, the English martyr, the Mass is like a spiritual sun which radiates its light and warmth to us each day—words which were directed against the Lutherans who denied the Mass, and whose churches were cold for want of warmth from this spiritual sun. These additional gifts of the Mass and Holy Communion call for a further and special act of thanksgiving, and devotion to the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus exists for this very purpose of thanking God for the institution of the Eucharist. The "Eucharistic Heart of Jesus" is to be understood as referring to the heart of Jesus who gave us the gift of the Eucharist and continues to do so daily.

The third end of sacrifice is *reparation* for the sins committed against God, especially for the acts of sacrilege sometimes so atrocious and clearly instigated by the devil. God alone knows the enormity of some of these acts of sacrilege which remind us of the treachery of Judas. In reparation for such abominable behaviour the Mass should be celebrated with reverence, and the Blessed Sacrament should be publicly exposed for adoration.

This act of reparation restores to God the Father and to Christ the accidental glory of which they are deprived by such sins, and it is also a source of joy to them—a joy which many have refused to give. It puts us in mind of the act of reverence paid by Saint Veronica during the Passion, when she wiped the face of Christ with a towel on which was left an impression of his countenance.

Public reparation wards off those heavy, public chastisements of God which the world has deserved by its sins; it also pleads for mercy for sinners, that they may return to the way of salvation and repent of their sins. All this is accomplished by the act of sacrifice. And among the souls who have fully grasped

this purpose of sacrifice are some who offer themselves as victims. In saving the world from the dread chastisements of God they serve a purpose in the spiritual sphere similar to that of a lightning-conductor in the material sphere. "He it is that has scourged us for our sins; he it is that will deliver us in his mercy" (Tobias xiii, 5). This mercy is won for us by the act of reparation in eucharistic worship, which perpetuates the act of reparation offered in the sacrifice of the Cross.

The fourth end of sacrifice is *to request the divine help* and all the graces necessary for salvation, especially the grace of final perseverance. True, this grace cannot be merited but it can be obtained through the imperative power of prayer, especially of the highest form of prayer contained in the actual offering of the sacrifice of the Mass, in which endures the intercession of Christ "living on still to make intercession on our behalf." We should unite ourselves to his intercession, just as we unite ourselves to his adoration and reparation and thanksgiving. The value of our own acts are thus increased beyond all measure.

Even after Mass Christ's intercession continues in the Eucharist. We should join in this prolonged act of prayer by making our own prayer less individualistic and more concerned with the Church, its bishops and priests, that God may give them the necessary zeal and courage; with the peace and concord of nations; with the freedom of the Church and the sanctification of souls; with the conversion of sinners and unbelievers. Such prayer is in harmony with the intentions of God, and, if it is offered by several at the same time humbly, confidently, and perseveringly, it is certain to bear abundant fruit.

We find amongst those who fully understand this particular purpose of sacrifice souls of a more contemplative disposition, like Mary Magdalen at the feet of Christ, or the angels adoring the King of Heaven. There are others who are consumed by an ardent love for the Church of Christ—living lamps, so to speak, burning in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Or perhaps they remind us of Our Lady in the upper room after the Ascension, whose prayer of intercession for the Church they are continuing. Other souls of a more active character take part in the worship of the Eucharist, in order to perfect their interior life which is the vital principle of a fruitful apostolate.

These, then, are the four ends of sacrifice, and their consideration is not without its practical value because it shows how we remember, in the first place, God's unending life by the act of adoration; secondly, the past by our act of thanksgiving for gifts received and by our act of reparation for sins committed; and, finally, the future by our request for divine help.

Eucharistic worship, when viewed in this light, unites us closely to Christ the priest, to his reparative adoration, to his intercession, and to his thanksgiving.

*Christ's interior life in the Eucharist—a model of the principal virtues*

In order to approach this question in a true theological spirit, we should remember that the Christ present in the Eucharist is the risen Christ reigning in glory in Heaven. He no longer suffers nor merits, but exercises those virtues which continue after death by his adoration, intercession, thanksgiving, and so on. Moreover, Christ in Heaven knows quite clearly what is happening on earth; he is fully aware of the eucharistic worship of the present time which increases his non-essential happiness, and also of the acts of profanation which deny him such happiness.

St. Thomas reminds us (*Summa, Ia IIae, q. 67*) that in Heaven the virtues of faith and hope cease to exist; the Beatific Vision replaces faith, and the permanent possession of God replaces hope. But charity remains; so also do the moral virtues and the seven gifts. True, the material of the moral virtues will be missing in Heaven, but not their formal element—their ordering of man towards sanctity: "There is no place in Heaven for inordinate desires and the pleasures of food and sex, nor for fear and daring in dangers of death, nor for the distribution and exchange of goods used in this life."

In the light of these principles it is easy to understand the distinction made by Blessed Peter Julian Eymard (*loc cit., p. 88*) between what can be said of the Eucharist with literal truth, and what is only metaphorically true. It is literally true to say that in the Eucharist Christ no longer leads an external life, he no longer visits the sick or preaches. He is present in the tabernacle as "a prisoner of love", a prisoner of his own choosing. He does not use any external sense-faculty to grasp the surroundings of the Eucharist; these he knows through his

infused knowledge and the Beatific Vision. Therefore Christ's life in the Eucharist is entirely interior and yet most perfect, thus teaching us the virtues of solitude, silence, and recollection. He is most anxious to give us there an example of many of the virtues—charity for his Father and for souls, religion (insofar as he is adoring, thanking, and interceding with his Father unceasingly), humility and obedience in being completely subject to the divine will, meekness, since he never experienced any unruly passion.

But above all, as Blessed Peter Eymard says (p. 90), "the life of Christ in the Eucharist is a life of love for his Father, to whom he is incessantly offering his actions, his sacramental presence, his previous Passion now commemorated in the Mass. It is also a life of love for men who have to be saved. His heart is the centre of all hearts."

An excellent example of this devotion for the Eucharist is Our Blessed Lady: "her heart was drawn towards the Blessed Sacrament as iron is towards a magnet" (p. 93). And she should not be denied the miraculous privilege, granted to some of the saints, of preserving the sacred species incorrupt within herself from one Communion to the next.

Blessed Peter Julian Eymard is perfectly correct in speaking of eucharistic humility, eucharistic poverty, eucharistic piety, eucharistic charity. He says, for example, that in the Eucharist the divinity, power, glory, and even humanity of Christ are concealed; that he lives a life of poverty; that he labours unceasingly for the saving of souls, but mysteriously and in silence, so that the world hardly notices his activity. In consequence, anyone living in close union with Christ in the Eucharist is bound to lead an interior life of intense charity, but his external life must be poor and humble. There will be numerous occasions for inward joy, but he does not show it outwardly: "His life is hidden with Christ in God."

"The virtues of his soul should be lofty and perfect, but, in appearance, simple and ordinary; in a word, they should resemble a burning brazier hidden under ashes" (p. 95). The heart of Christ is a blazing furnace of charity hidden under the sacred species—the very antithesis to anything spectacular.

Christ's life in the Eucharist is one of charity as well as of humility—charity which is gracious, patient, beneficent. It is

gracious towards the poor and afflicted, patient in waiting for us to visit him, beneficent to all—even to his enemies, whom he draws towards conversion. Christ is present in the Eucharist as the victim of love, immolated without the shedding of blood in the sacrifice of Mass, and attracting many souls to a life of reparation.

An excellent summary of all that we have said about devotion to the Eucharist is contained in the Litany of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, which rises from the lowly state of Christ in the Eucharist to the sublime union of intimacy which he extends to generous souls.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Conclusion: the Eucharist and priestly perfection*

Devotion to the Eucharist, when regarded in this light, is an effective means of attaining to priestly perfection. Cf. Blessed Peter Julian Eymard, *loc. cit.*, p. 161, 180, 230, 232.

This follows from the fact that Christ, really present in the Eucharist, is the source of all the actual efficacious graces which perfect our spiritual life. This influence of Christ in the Eucharist is similar to that present in his meeting with Peter after the

<sup>1</sup> The following prayer is particularly appropriate for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

#### PRAYER TO THE EUCHARISTIC HEART OF JESUS

Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, gracious companion of our exile, I adore you. Eucharistic Heart of Jesus—lonely Heart—humiliated Heart—abandoned Heart—forgotten Heart—despised Heart—outraged Heart—Heart ignored by men—Heart which loves our own hearts—Heart pleading for our love—Heart so patient in waiting for us—Heart so eager to listen to our prayers—Heart so anxious for our requests—Heart, unending source of new graces—Heart so silent, yet desiring to speak to souls—Heart, welcome refuge of the hidden life—Heart, teacher of the secrets of union with God—Heart of him who sleeps but watches always—Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us.

Jesus Victim, I desire to comfort you; I unite myself to you; I offer myself in union with you. I regard myself as nothing in your presence. I long to forget myself in order to think only of you, to be despised and forgotten for love of you. I have no desire to be understood or loved by anyone but you. I will keep silent in order to listen to you, and I will abandon myself in order to lose myself in you.

Grant that I may thus satisfy your thirst for my salvation, your burning thirst for my holiness, and that once purified I may give you a sincere and pure love. I am anxious not to tire you further with waiting: take me, I hand myself over to you. I give you all my actions, my mind to be enlightened, my heart to be directed, my will to be stabilized, my wretchedness to be relieved, my soul and body to be nourished by you.

Eucharistic Heart of my Saviour, whose blood is the life of my soul, may I myself cease to live and you alone live in me. Amen.

Resurrection. To enable him to make amends for his previous denial Christ asked Peter: "Simon, son of John, dost thou love me?" Peter replied: "Yes, Lord, thou knowest well that I love thee" (John xxi, 16). Finally, Christ said to him: "Feed my lambs and tend my shearlings", and then foretold his martyrdom. This prophecy was accompanied by grace, already preparing him to be constant under the trial of martyrdom. Christ's influence in the Eucharist is of a similar nature—although hidden—inspiring effective and persevering love.

For this reason our faith is often put to the test by a long period of sense aridity—as in the case of Blessed Peter Eymard when he was awaiting vocations, and none came. After his one and only companion had deserted him, he remained on his knees before the Blessed Sacrament: "Lord, I shall stay here on my knees until my friend returns." Three or four hours later he did return. Eventually many other excellent vocations arrived, so that the Congregation began to spread far and wide reaping a rich harvest in France, Italy, and other parts of Europe, as also in North and South America. This trial of faith leads many souls to perfection.

#### *The Eucharistic vocation*

Every follower of Christ—especially his priests—are invited to worship him in the Eucharist, but there are some who receive a special vocation to this devotion—the Eucharistic vocation. "Nobody can come to me without being attracted towards me by the Father who sent me" (John vi, 44). And the Father attracts everyone to salvation, but not necessarily along the same path.

What is this Eucharistic vocation, in the opinion of Blessed Peter Eymard? (p. 230). It is a special attraction of grace, gentle but compelling—as if Christ were saying to the soul: Come to my sanctuary. Provided no resistance is offered, this attraction gradually becomes supreme.

The faithful soul responding to this invitation finds peace, as though it had discovered at long last its natural home and spiritual food: "I have found my resting-place." Books and conferences no longer give the help required; this can only be found in more intense prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

Ultimately this attraction of grace leads the soul to a complete offering of itself to the service of the Eucharist, in order to become a true adorer of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. The individual does not devote himself to this worship merely to save his own soul or to acquire virtue or even to save the souls of others; but, realizing that his love for God and for Christ should always have precedence over his love for his neighbour, he is simply anxious to respond to Christ's invitation: "True worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; such men as these the Father claims for his worshippers" (John iv, 23). That is the order to be observed in charity, and the love of our neighbour will always grow in proportion to our love of God. But he is to be loved above everyone.

In this act of adoration is also included what St. Thomas and others used to call the contemplation of divine things, for this is the natural result of a living faith enlightened by the gifts of the Holy Ghost and it also commands the virtue of religion. Now the highest act of this virtue is sacrifice, especially the sacrifice of worship.

So it is clear that devotion to the Eucharist—as outlined above—does lead to priestly perfection; the priest is transformed into another Christ in virtue of the continual influence of Christ in the Eucharist.

In fact, many are the souls who have attained to holiness in this way. Hence we must strive humbly and confidently each day for this spirit of devotion to the Eucharist, asking God to grant us the necessary efficacious grace, so that we may give glory to God and save souls.

## CHAPTER SIX

THE PRIEST IN UNION WITH MARY—WITH  
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE INFLUENCE  
OF HER UNIVERSAL MEDIATION ON THE  
SPIRITUAL FORMATION OF PRIESTS

THIS chapter falls into two parts: the first considers what is required for the spiritual formation of priests, and the second discusses how Our Blessed Lady is admirably suited to meet these needs, progressively shaping the priest's soul both by her prayer and by the mysterious influence of her universal mediation.<sup>1</sup>

*The priest's intellectual and spiritual formation*

It is easy to discover what is required for the spiritual and intellectual formation of a priest by studying the failings which ought to be avoided—even though we are constantly falling into them.

There are many novices and seminarists who neglect one or other aspect of their priestly training. Some of them do not put sufficient effort into their study, so that they may become priests fully instructed in Christian doctrine for the good of souls committed to their care later on. They excuse their negligence on the plea of devoting more time to spiritual exercises, and thus they become indolent and careless—faults which may easily last for the whole of their priestly life, while the souls committed to their care look to them for the help which only a priest can give.

Other novices and seminary students go to the other extreme. They concentrate so much on their studies that they neglect their interior life and spiritual duties under the pretext of necessary study. Gradually they may lose their spirit of piety completely, and possess nothing more than an "official piety", the exterior piety of a church functionary. Problems of philosophy, of theology, of history, of canon law—these are their constant pre-occupation. Sometimes they become so entangled in the

complex network of these problems that they lose that higher simplicity of mind which is essential for preserving a wise and correct critical faculty—all the more necessary as the problems become more complex.

In other words, their intellectual pursuits are no longer sufficiently inspired by the spirit of faith and of love for God and for souls. They are treated as purely natural activities rather than as means of holiness, and are motivated by an inordinate love of self, by egoism, or, perhaps, by a secret pride and ambition. These novices and seminarists are certainly not preparing themselves for a fruitful apostolate.

They are living a superficial life, more concerned with external appearances than with their inner self. They find themselves entangled in a maze of questions, possessing no unity of mind. Why? Because they lack that supernatural spirit which is essential if they are to order their study correctly towards God and the saving of souls.

In a word, their outlook is almost exclusively directed towards externals, it is too superficial, too complicated. Their mind lacks unity, depth, and elevation—or, as the moderns would say, the third dimension is missing. Extent and breadth of knowledge they possess, but no depth. Hence they are mentally immature and without that keen perception of intellect which is required if a priest is to have the critical faculty expected of him.

In addition to these intellectual difficulties, there are those arising from the affections which are allowed to turn aside from their true object and become too human, too sensual, and therefore, dangerous. These can prove a serious obstacle to that spirit of chastity and purity of heart which is necessary for a truly spiritual and priestly life.

Therefore, what is required? A greater unity, depth, and elevation of life, so that the priest may live under the continual impulse of the theological virtues and under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost by way of the seven gifts. "The Spirit breathes where he will", and the small barque of our soul will be driven along the right course, provided that its sails are not secured by too many ropes—venial sins of sensuality, curiosity, indiscretion, hidden pride, ambition.

But how is the seminarist or novice or young priest to find

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Fr. Paul Philippe, O.P., *La Très Sainte Vierge et le Sacerdoce*, Paris, 1946.

this greater unity, depth, and elevation of life which he requires in order to rise above the complex nature of his studies and above the dangers of sentimentality and sensuality?

In order to become a good priest, the seminarist or novice needs the help of a spiritual mother, holy, vigilant, brave, benevolent, loving, who will keep him on his course like the star of the sea; who, as the invisible mistress of his soul, secretly but none the less really and securely directs his intellect, will, and sense-faculties.

I myself had personal experience of this need as a young student. At that time I was so engrossed in the many and varied questions of critica and metaphysics that I was in danger of losing my simplicity and elevation of mind and balanced judgment. It was then I realized that I needed a spiritual mother with unlimited kindness and wisdom. This is easily understood when we remember how any child receives its early training.

While the seminarist or novice was young, there were many things which he learnt from his earthly mother—his first prayers, for example. At that age he was ready to believe anything his mother told him, especially when she spoke to him of God, our heavenly Father. He trusted her implicitly and loved her with the love of his whole heart. And so, in his younger days, he made spontaneous acts of faith, hope, and charity towards God, whom he had come to know through his mother, and these acts were made even before he had learnt the formula set down for them in the catechism.

Each of us learned much from our mother even without the aid of words. When we saw her return from the altar-rails in deep recollection and gratitude, we understood—some more than others—that this act of thanksgiving was something mysterious and sacred.

The time comes when the novice or seminarist has to leave his earthly mother, but it is then that he needs a spiritual mother to watch over his priestly formation, so that his life may bear almost spontaneous and continual witness in a practical form to the workings of the three theological virtues. These virtues, together with humility and perfect purity, must be constantly growing, so that the future priest may live not for himself but for God and the saving of souls.

The study of philosophy, theology, history, and canon law is insufficient; the concentration required could make the soul a stranger to itself, if it did not remain united to God. Furthermore, it would find itself almost irretrievably lost in the maze of such questions, and then what would we find in such a soul, if it lacked a genuine spiritual life? Certainly not God, but self-love, secret ambition, and a craving for personal satisfaction.

To prevent this superficiality and entanglement of mind during our study and to quicken our intellectual efforts with spiritual life, we require a loftier spirit—a spirit of humility, self-denial, purity, faith, confidence, love of God and souls.

But where are we to look for this spirit on which depend the unity and elevation of our life?

In actual fact, Christ our Saviour has willed to communicate this spirit to us through the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom he has chosen to be the universal mediatrix of all graces—of all kinds of graces, for she is the mother and queen of apostles, of martyrs, of confessors, of virgins, and of all saints. This spiritual mother of all men obtains for us every grace we receive—even those particular graces for which we ask when we pray: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us *now . . .*"; this "*now*" means that we are asking for the individual grace of the present moment—for example, for study, for chastity, for the preservation of charity.

Our spiritual mother teaches us without the aid of words, and gives us something far more valuable than mere learning in theology or philosophy; she gives us the spirit of sacred wisdom, which is first and foremost a powerful spirit of living faith in God—a discerning faith in virtue of the gift of understanding, a contemplative faith in virtue of the gift of wisdom.

The soul of the seminarist or novice is no longer a stranger to itself in its studies, for these are now inspired by a spirit of faith. They are no longer born of curiosity or ambition, nor are they treated as purely natural activities.

The student never again loses himself in the complex network of problems which call for his attention, since he now possesses a suitable approach to his study and a sufficiently supernatural elevation of mind. In this way Our Blessed Lady can become the priest's guide not only for the preservation of chastity,

humility, and fraternal charity, but also for the study of sacred science. This is her method of training her sons preparing for the priesthood.

### *The influence of Mary*

Why is Our Blessed Lady capable of exerting her influence on the training of priests? Why is she so anxious to do so—and in what way does she put her desire into effect?

Our Blessed Lady has the *power* to exert this wonderful influence on our souls because she is the Mother of God, the Mother of the Saviour, the Mother of the high priest of the New Law, the universal mediatrix of all graces. But, in addition to this power which she possesses, she also has the *desire* to exercise it because she is supremely kind, benevolent, and loving. Furthermore, she puts this desire *into effect*, once we ask her to be our mother and to prepare us each day for the worthy reception of the priesthood and for the fruitful exercise of our office later on.

This is evident if we consider, first, the relation existing between the divine motherhood and the priesthood; secondly, Our Lady as the spiritual mother of priests; and finally, Our Lady as the outstanding example of devotion to the Eucharist.<sup>1</sup>

### *The divine motherhood and the priesthood*

In considering this subject it is essential to adhere closely to the literal sense of the words involved, avoiding the exaggerated use of metaphor—a frequent fault in this matter—because in such metaphors it is difficult to know what precisely is true. Our Lady has sometimes been referred to as the “Virgin priest”, without sufficient note being taken of the fact that she is not a priest in the strict sense of the word. She has not received the priestly character, and therefore, cannot consecrate the Eucharist. However, she is in a most eminent way a priest in the wide sense of the term—to a greater degree than any of the saints who were not priests, such as St. Francis of Assisi, or St. Benedict Joseph Labre. As Fr. Olier points out so rightly, Our Lady possessed the *spirit of the priesthood* to a degree surpassing everyone else, but she was never a priest in the strict sense of the word. And thus we find that the Holy Office has

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the excellent work written by Fr. P. Philippe, O.P., *La Très Sainte Vierge et le Sacerdoce*.

forbidden the use of that title “Virgin priest”, because it could give rise to the Protestant confusion between the priesthood in the strict sense of the word and the priesthood in the wide sense.

But it must be said at once that the superlative dignity of Our Lady’s divine motherhood far and away exceeds the priesthood of Christ’s ministers. This is a point which deserves our careful consideration. The pre-eminence of her dignity is derived from two sources. In the first place, Our Lady as the Mother of God has given us the principal priest and victim of the sacrifice of the Cross, since it is in his humanity that Christ is both priest and victim. Now, it is obviously a greater dignity to give the incarnate Word his humanity than to make his body really present in the Eucharist, which is what his ministers do by their instrumental power. And secondly, Mary as the co-redemptrix of the human race offered together with Christ the blood-stained sacrifice of the Cross. This is a greater honour than to offer the bloodless sacrifice of the Mass, which is the means of applying to souls the merits of the Passion.

But we can go still further, and find the basis of Mary’s superior dignity in the fact that her divine motherhood surpasses not only the order of nature but also the order of grace. In virtue of the term of that relation of motherhood, it belongs to the hypostatic order established by the mystery of the Incarnation. Furthermore, as is stated in the Bull proclaiming the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, the decree of the Incarnation of the Word from the Virgin Mary includes at the same time both the predestination of Christ to natural divine sonship and the predestination of Mary to divine motherhood. From this follows her predestination to a degree of glory next to that enjoyed by Christ, and to her fulness of grace which fitted her to be the worthy Mother of God.

The Bull *Ineffabilis Deus* begins as follows: “From the beginning and before all ages, the God of indescribable perfection chose and prepared for his only-begotten Son the mother from whom he would receive his body and be born in the blessed fulness of time. His love for her so exceeded his love for all other creatures that in her alone did he take most friendly delight.” And, further on: “(God’s choice of her was made) in one and the same decree as the Incarnation of the divine

Wisdom." In other words, this eternal decree did not relate to the Incarnation in any abstract form, but as it was to take place at a definite point in time and place. It referred to an individual event occurring in definite circumstances—to the Incarnation of the Son of God from the Virgin Mary, as we affirm in the Nicene Creed.

Therefore, by one and the same decree, Christ was predestined in his humanity to natural divine sonship and Mary to divine motherhood. But this decree preceded the one which determined the salvation of the human race through the merits of Christ. Hence Our Lady was first predestined to her divine motherhood as being the most important of all her honours, and then to her glory in heaven. In the same way, Christ was first predestined to his natural divine sonship as the pre-eminent source of all his dignity, before being predestined to his glory. For, that to which one is first predestined is the end and purpose of all future decisions, and is of higher worth than anything else to which one may be predestined afterwards.

It is clear, therefore, that the divine motherhood is superior to the fulness of grace and glory which flowed from it for the purpose of making Our Lady the worthy Mother of God. This superior dignity of the divine motherhood is due to the fact that it belongs to the hypostatic order by reason of its term, and thus surpasses the order of grace.

There are several important consequences resulting from these principles.

In the first place, although Mary could merit like ourselves everlasting life, she could not have merited the divine motherhood which is so intimately connected with the Incarnation. This would be to merit the Incarnation itself, which has been the original source of all the merits of the human race since the time of the Fall—including those of Mary herself. Divine motherhood, like the Incarnation, lies beyond the realm of merit, because the principle of merit cannot itself be merited.

Secondly, the divine motherhood is the explanation of all the graces conferred on Mary, and thus it is their measure and their purpose. Consequently it is something superior to all those graces. This is the common teaching of theologians.

Thirdly, because of her divine motherhood, Mary is entitled

to receive from us not only the highest form of honour paid to any saint, but also the special veneration which we call "hyperdulia."<sup>1</sup>

It cannot be denied, therefore, that the divine motherhood surpasses in grandeur the priesthood of Christ's ministers. Also, she more than any other saint is a priest in the wide sense of the term; she shares in the mystical priesthood in the highest degree possible. The reason is abundantly clear. She has given us the principal priest and victim of the sacrifice of Calvary, and she co-operated with Christ in the offering of this sacrifice, so that she has merited for us by congruous merit all that Christ merited for us in strict justice.<sup>2</sup> She merited the actual release from sin and the restoration to divine favour of the entire human race—redemption in its objective aspect—and not merely the applying of the merits of the Passion to individual souls—redemption in its subjective aspect. While she is not a priest in the strict sense of the word she has received the fulness of the spirit of the priesthood, the spirit of Christ the Redeemer. This is well explained by Fr. Olier in his book, *La vie intime de la Sainte Vierge*.

#### *Mary, the spiritual mother of priests*

When Christ was dying on the Cross, he turned to his Mother and said: "Woman, this is thy son"; and to John: "This is thy mother."

These words of the dying Saviour, like the words used in the sacraments, produced what they signified: in Mary's soul they produced an increase of maternal love for John and for all who should be sanctified through the sacrifice of the Cross; in John's soul they produced a profound filial love for the Mother of God.

<sup>1</sup> It follows, therefore, that if the Mother of God were to receive the priestly character she would be receiving something of less value than her original dignity, since it is a greater honour to give the Word his humanity and to offer with him the sacrificial shedding of blood on Calvary than to give him his real presence in the Eucharist and to offer with him the bloodless sacrifice of the Mass. Similarly, as St. Thomas rightly says, a bishop while able to be of service in the saving of souls would be adopting a less perfect vocation in entering the religious state, because the religious state is one in which a man is tending towards perfection, whereas a bishop should be actually exercising perfection. *Summa, IIa IIae, q. 185, a. 4, ad 1.*

<sup>2</sup> This—the common teaching of theologians—was sanctioned by Pius X in his encyclical *Ad diem*, 2nd February, 1904; cf. Denz. 1978a.

Since Mary is the spiritual mother of all priests, she is interested especially in their sanctification and in their ministry. She offers special prayers for her priests, and obtains for them increasingly higher graces so that they may offer the sacrifice of the Mass more worthily, and labour for the salvation of souls more earnestly. But her choicest gift to priests is a better understanding of the sacrifice of Calvary, which is continued sacramentally in the Mass. She also obtains for them the graces they need to appreciate better the value of Christ's blood, the supreme importance of the eternal happiness of souls, and the deep wretchedness of eternal damnation.

In this way, priests who remain faithful to Mary are fired by her with extraordinary zeal. This is particularly true of those priests who consecrate themselves to Mary in the way suggested by St. Louis Marie de Montfort in his book, *Treatise on true devotion to the Blessed Virgin*. This work has now been translated into almost every language, and is regarded as a precious jewel amongst the many treasures of the Church.

By this act of consecration priests hand over to Mary all those merits properly so-called (*de condigno*) which cannot be applied to others, asking her to guard this spiritual treasure against the enemies of their soul. Should they have the misfortune to lose this treasure through mortal sin, they rely on her to obtain for them the grace of fervent contrition, so that the store of merit which they previously possessed may be restored in its entirety. St. Thomas says (IIIa, q. 89, a. 2): "The intensity of a penitent's sorrow for sin is sometimes proportionate to a greater degree of grace than that which he possessed before committing his sin; on other occasions, it corresponds to an equal or even to a smaller degree of grace. And therefore, the grace received after forgiveness is sometimes greater than it was before (this was probably true of Peter when he repented of his triple denial), sometimes equal, sometimes less. The same is true of the virtues which flow from grace."

Therefore those who consecrate themselves in this special way to the Blessed Virgin Mary entrust to her their merits *de condigno*, so that they may be well guarded, bear fruit, and be fully restored through fervent contrition, if ever they should be lost by mortal sin.

Moreover, these votaries of Mary place in her hands whatever

part of their good works may be given over to other souls—their merits of congruity, the satisfactory value of their acts, their prayers for others, the indulgences which they gain. Our Lady certainly distributes these gifts to others with greater wisdom and charity than we would. This does not mean that we need not pray for our relatives and friends; this is an obligation due in gratitude, which Our Lady would not allow us to forget. But amongst our relatives and friends there are some who stand in urgent need of help without our knowing who they are. Our Blessed Lady knows perfectly well who they are, and she takes care to give them as much help as possible from our good works. The conclusion to be drawn from what we have said is obvious—Mary, as the spiritual mother of priests, gives special help to those who consecrate themselves to her in the way described, both in their interior life and in their ministry.

How does Our Blessed Lady bring about the spiritual formation of those who follow out this suggested path of consecration to her? St. Louis Marie de Montfort gives the explanation: "Mary is like a mould in which Jesus forms his saints." She is the model of sanctity, the prototype which Christ follows in forming saints.

St. Louis says that there are two forms of spiritual direction, just as there are two ways of making a statue. A statue can be made by hammering and chiselling a piece of wood or marble—a difficult and lengthy process, during which a single awkward blow may ruin the entire work. But there is another way, a much easier way—by putting clay into a mould. This is the method which Christ adopts for the spiritual formation of souls who have a great love for Our Blessed Lady, and who are urged by that love to a humble imitation of her virtues.

#### *Mary, an outstanding example of devotion to the Eucharist*

Christ entrusted his Mother to St. John the Evangelist—a model of contemplation—who celebrated the eucharistic sacrifice in virtue of his priestly power, and gave Our Lady Holy Communion.<sup>1</sup> For Our Blessed Lady the eucharistic sacrifice was a perfect memorial of the sacrifice of the Cross, which remained vividly imprinted on her memory. In consequence,

<sup>1</sup> Fr. Olier draws attention to this point in his book: *Vie intérieure de Marie* p. 250, and in his *Panégyrique de S. Jean*.

the real presence of the sacred victim and the bloodless immolation on the altar were for her of supreme value. She penetrated into the meaning of this mystery even more deeply than did St. John, and also realized more perfectly that Christ is the principal priest actually offering the Masses celebrated each day. Neither the faith of St. John nor our own faith will bear comparison with Mary's active faith, enlightened by the gifts, in its grasp of the full meaning of these words: "He lives on still to make intercession on our behalf."

During Mary's lifetime the liturgy of the Mass did not yet exist in the form in which we find it, for example, in the third or fourth century. There was the eucharistic sacrifice, the breaking of bread, and the eucharistic Communion, which Our Lady herself must certainly have received—although this has been called into question. However we cannot think of Our Blessed Lady as anything but an exemplary Christian. Moreover, she saw in the eucharistic sacrifice or "breaking of bread" the uniting together of worship offered in Heaven and of that offered on earth, since it is the same principal priest present sacramentally on the altar who is also in Heaven in his natural and glorified state. Our Blessed Lady knew quite well that the celebrant is only the *minister* of Christ, speaking and acting in his name.

Her faith, enlightened by the gifts, enabled her to see clearly the effect of consecration—the real presence of Christ on the altar—and also the effects of the sacrifice on souls in Purgatory and on earth. No other creature on earth has ever possessed such faith, perfected by the gifts of understanding and of wisdom. For that reason she was able to appreciate far better than we can how the Mass extends its influence over the whole earth and into Purgatory and even into Heaven, in so far as it gives glory to God.

In the same way as on Calvary she had joined her own personal offering to that of her Son, so whenever she assisted at the eucharistic sacrifice she offered herself as the universal mediatrix and co-redemptrix on behalf of the Apostles and of the entire Church. This she did in view of her profound understanding of the four ends of the sacrifice.

Apart from the homage paid by Christ himself, God has never received from any of his creatures more humble adoration,

more sincere and universal thanksgiving, more valuable and efficacious reparation and intercession for the saving of souls of every race and condition. This prayer of Mary was the main-stay of the Apostles as they journeyed through the world preaching the Gospel and at the supreme moment of their martyrdom. Mary has always been and still is the queen and mother of every apostle.

But, while thinking of Mary's participation in the eucharistic sacrifice, we must not lose sight of her devotion in receiving Holy Communion.<sup>1</sup>

The more we hunger for Holy Communion, the greater our fervour in receiving it and the profit we draw from it. But we cannot experience this spiritual hunger unless we believe in the value of the Eucharist and its fruits, unless we hope and love. Now Mary possessed these three theological virtues in the highest degree. (See my former book, *The Mother of the Saviour*, pp. 134–140.)

Mary's firm and ardent desire to receive her Son in Holy Communion was not checked in any way by the consequences of original sin, or by any actual sin—even the least grave—or by any voluntary imperfection. For his part Jesus desired most eagerly to consummate the holiness of his dearly beloved mother.

Therefore each of Mary's Communions was spiritually more fervent and more fruitful than the preceding one. The nearer she approached to God, the more rapid was her progress towards him—just as a body increases its rate of fall the nearer it approaches the earth, although this is but a weak symbol of Mary's spiritual progress.

Holy Communion brought to her each day a great increase in charity and in the infused virtues and the gifts, and prepared her for an even better Communion on the following day. And thus she never faltered in her increasingly rapid progress towards God. This is the law of grace which all of us should follow, but it remains partly unfulfilled in us because of our attachment to venial sin. For this reason our Holy Communion may be spiritually less fervent one day than on the preceding day. But in Mary there was no venial sin to check this law of spiritual acceleration.

<sup>1</sup> This is discussed by Fr. Justin of Miechow O.P. in his work: *Discursus circa itineras lauretanarum B. Mariae Virginis; vas insigne devotionis.*

In this, Mary was the model of eucharistic devotion—the glorious vessel of devotion.

The effects of her Holy Communion were remarkable. Christ present in the Eucharist shed on her pure soul his supernatural light and love, thus giving her greater understanding of this sacrament and a greater desire for it. She was, as it were, a spotless mirror reflecting back on Christ the light and love she received from him, and directing towards us the graces of faith, hope, and love.

In Mary the priest is provided with a perfect model of eucharistic devotion. She teaches him to celebrate his Mass in a spirit of sacrifice, in a spirit of reparative worship. If he fails to possess this spirit of sacrifice, he will prove a hindrance to the flow of grace from Calvary to individual souls. He should think of what would have happened to us if Christ had refused to accept the humiliations of the Passion, or if Our Blessed Lady had refused to join her own personal offering to that of Christ.

The priest, therefore, in union with Christ and Mary, should pray most earnestly for the chief intentions of the Church and for the salvation of souls who have to live in the world surrounded by pernicious errors. He must also ask Our Lady to obtain for him a hunger and thirst for the Eucharist, so that his Holy Communion may become each day at least spiritually more fervent. It is in this way that he will arrive at that zeal for the glory of God and for the saving of souls without which he cannot attain to priestly perfection, or to that spirit of Christ, which is indispensable for a fruitful apostolate.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE EXAMPLE OF THE SAINTS

**I**t would be possible to write this chapter on the way in which the saints who were priests celebrated their Mass by quoting what has been said of the following: St. Bernard, St. Dominic, St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure, St. Charles Borromeo, St. Francis of Sales, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Philip Neri, St. Paul of the Cross, St. Alphonsus, St. John Vianney—together with his friend Fr. Chevrier.

However, I intend to mention only those facts which I can remember at the moment of writing. St. Dominic used to spend practically the whole night in church, praying and doing penance for the sinners to whom he would preach the Gospel on the following day. That was his preparation for celebrating Mass, during which he was often moved to tears. St. Thomas also received this gift of tears. And he, too, would often remain in church to pray for several hours during the night, either before the Office or after Lauds before celebrating Mass.

St. Francis of Sales, as we read in his life written by Fr. Hamon, vol. ii, p. 376, carried out the ceremonies of the Mass with all possible recollection and devotion, remaining calm and dignified throughout. Those who assisted at his Mass could see that his mind and heart were totally absorbed in God. We have it on the testimony of St. Frances of Chantal that he was never distracted. He was the living image of Jesus Christ. At the moment of consecration and communion his bearing as a priest was so imposing, but as a victim so humble, that he seemed to be completely transformed into God, so to speak—as though he had reached the transforming union. His face revealed such interior happiness and joy that his congregation could not help but be impressed. Those who saw him receive Holy Communion, when his head appeared to be crowned by rays of glory and his brow encircled by a ring of light, treasured the scene in their memory until the day of their death, and testified to the fact in the court for his canonization.

It is also told of him that he took such care in preparing for

his Mass that he was eager to go to confession every day before approaching the altar.

For St. Philip Neri the Mass was a time of deep contemplation and most ardent love, so much so that he was often rapt in ecstasy during the sacrifice.

St. John Vianney used to say that if only we fully realized the meaning of the Mass and its infinite value, we would certainly die. "One would need to be a saint to celebrate worthily. When we are in Heaven, we will appreciate the value of the Mass, and how often we have said it without due reverence, or worship, or recollection." This we will know even in Purgatory, when it will no longer be possible to celebrate Mass either for ourselves or for others.

All these saints united the personal offering of their own trials and sufferings to that of the sacred victim for the salvation of souls. The author of the *Imitation* writes, bk. iv, c. 8: "Christ says: As I willingly offered Myself to God the Father for thy sins, with My hands stretched out upon the Cross, and My Body naked, so that nothing remained in Me which was not completely turned into a Sacrifice to appease the divine wrath; even so oughtest thou willingly to offer thyself to Me daily in the Mass, as intimately as thou canst, with thy whole energies and affections, for a pure and holy oblation. . . . Offer thyself to Me, and give thy whole self for God, and thy offering shall be accepted. . . . But if thou wilt stand upon self, and not offer thyself freely to My will, thy offering is not complete, nor will there be an entire union between us."

This was realized to the full by Fr. Charles de Foucauld, who, finding himself unable to convert the Mohammedans owing to their lack of good will, offered himself on their behalf during the sacrifice of the Mass. In the end he was put to death out of hatred for religion, and he died as a victim of love for souls.

The Mass celebrated by a saint is, so to speak, a prelude to the homage of Heaven, expressed in the words of the Preface: "Holy, holy, holy", in praise of the Blessed Trinity.

Therefore we should ask for the grace to celebrate our Mass with keener faith, more steadfast hope, more selfless and stronger love for God and souls. Our spirit of worship must become more enlightened, and the essential devotion of our will

more powerful. In this way, each of our Communions will become more fervent and more fruitful than the preceding one, by producing in us a daily growth in charity and so preparing us to receive Holy Communion on the morrow with an even greater fervour of will.

This is true of all good priests, even though they may not always realize it. St. Francis of Sales used to say of St. Frances of Chantal, who still retained her peace of soul even when deprived of all sensible devotion: "She is like a good singer stricken with deafness, unable to hear the voice which gives such pleasure to others." Beethoven suffered from deafness in the later years of his life, but he continued to be an outstanding composer. Though unable to hear his symphonies, he enjoyed an intellectual awareness of their beauty. This is symbolical of the aridity of the saints, who are sometimes deprived of all sense consolations and yet retain a most ardent spiritual love of God in the higher faculties of their soul. In this they resemble Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane where he began the sacrifice of the Cross, where he began to be a victim sacrificed by the shedding of his blood.

It would seem that Beethoven in his deafness had an even greater love for his art and the beauty of his harmonies which he could not hear. So also the saints. Sometimes while celebrating Mass they lose all their sensible devotion, but at those times they have an even greater love for the sacrifice whose value they do not then perceive, since they offer themselves in union with Christ and thus acquire more merit. But, generally speaking, there comes a time when their spiritual fervour overflows in some way into their sensible nature. That happened in the life of St. Paul of the Cross after forty years of extreme aridity and desolation. During that time he had given a perfect example of a life of reparation. But, before he died, God comforted him and favoured him with perfect peace as the final preparation for the happiness of Heaven.

So far we have spoken of Christ's priesthood, of our priesthood, of the interior life which priests must lead in union with Christ priest and victim, of eucharistic worship and its bearing on priestly perfection, and finally, of the priest's union with Mary. Now, by way of summary, we must consider the excellence of the priestly grace.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

THE EXCELLENCE OF THE PRIESTLY GRACE:  
A SUMMARY OF THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS

**I**N this chapter we will consider the pre-eminent and superabundant cause of the priestly grace; its principal purpose—the celebration of Mass; its secondary purpose—the sanctification of souls; the foundation of priestly holiness; the splendour of the sacramental grace of the priesthood.

*The pre-eminent cause of this excellence*

This is to be found in the holiness of Christ, a holiness which is innate, substantial, and uncreated, in so far as its determining principle is the grace of the hypostatic union, or the Word who takes possession of Christ's humanity. This is the source of the infinite value of all his activity. Now, in his final prayer for the Apostles Christ spoke as follows: "And for them do I sanctify myself that they also may be sanctified in truth" (John xvii, 19). That is to say: Father, I offer and sacrifice myself to you (cf. Bossuet, *Méditations sur l'évangile*, II, 66<sup>e</sup> jour), for in this verse "to sanctify" means "to sacrifice." Therefore a priest must sacrifice himself if he is to be another Christ. Cf. Rom. xv, 16: "So much I owe to the grace which God has given me, in making me a priest of Jesus Christ for the Gentiles, with God's gospel for my priestly charge, to make the Gentiles an offering worthy of acceptance, consecrated by the Holy Spirit": that is to say, I must show the Gospel to be holy both in preaching the truth and in working for the conversion of the Gentiles.

Sanctifying grace should be found in all the faithful, but in a special way in the priest. The holiness of a Christian consists in reproducing in oneself the life of Jesus Christ, our head: "We have all received something out of his abundance" (John i, 16). Sanctifying grace effects what its name signifies—it makes those who are justified holy. And so St. Paul refers to all the faithful in the state of grace as "saints." But there are varying degrees of this grace, as St. Paul says: "Each of us has received his own special grace, dealt out to him by Christ's gift" (Ephes.

iv, 7); and besides, some people make better use of actual grace in preparing themselves for sanctifying grace, which they then use more effectively than others. Cf. St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q. 112, a. 4. This ought to be especially true of the priest, so that we may find in him a fitting share in the holiness of Christ—the pre-eminent cause of all our holiness.

*The primary purpose of this grace*

The primary purpose of the priestly grace is the worthy celebration of the sacrifice of the Mass. "For the serving of Christ in the sacrament of the altar a greater interior holiness is required than that demanded for the religious state" (St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 184, a. 8). And that is why the solemn promise of celibacy, which is contained in the vow of chastity taken in the Western Church before receiving the diaconate, is eminently suited to the priesthood. St. Augustine wrote in his sixtieth letter to Aurelius (n.1): "Amongst those who stay in the monastery as monks, we will only accept for the clerical state those who are more virtuous and more perfect." The same condition is expressed in the Decree of Gelasius, which is often quoted by St. Thomas—for example, IIa IIae, q. 184, a.8, 4a obj.

This teaching is of the highest importance, and secular priests are deluding themselves if they think that only those in religion need make a serious effort for perfection. Some are of the opinion that so long as they remain in the state of grace, that is sufficient, since they are not bound to strive for that degree of interior perfection desired by a Carmelite nun or by other religious orders. That view is certainly not shared by the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. In fact, there have been many saintly religious—such as St. Pacomius—who feared the responsibility of the priesthood and refused priestly ordination. We must never lose sight of the high degree of holiness required for the worthy celebration of the sacrifice of the Mass. And this is the primary purpose of the priesthood.

*The secondary purpose of the priestly grace*

The secondary purpose of the grace which the priest receives at ordination is the sanctification of the faithful. If the priest has the care of souls, he has a special obligation to strive for

holiness of life, because of his duty towards the mystical body of Christ. In no other way will he be able to sanctify the souls committed to his charge, or avoid the dangers of the world which are not to be found in a monastery. (Cf. St. Thomas, *loc. cit.*)

The priest must be a man of prayer, mortified, and humble. His wisdom and prudence must be supernatural, and his intention must always be upright and pure. He must possess that strength of will which is born of great charity and zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. He should never revolt against adversity, and in all his work he should have Christ's interest at heart, not his own (Phil. ii, 21). "We are Christ's incense offered to God . . . a life-giving perfume where it finds life" (II Cor. ii, 15). "We carry about continually in our bodies the dying state of Jesus, so that the living power of Jesus may be manifested in our bodies too" (II Cor. iv, 10). That is to say, the priest must share not only in the priesthood of Christ but also in his state of victim to the degree determined by the will of God for the saving of the souls committed to his care.

This is the meaning of the following words of St. Thomas (IIa IIae, q. 184, a. 8): "By holy orders a man is appointed to the loftiest ministry of serving Christ himself in the sacrament of the altar. For this he requires a greater interior holiness than that demanded of a person in the religious state." It is also required for his ministering to souls, for his priestly apostolate.

True, a simple religious who is not a priest—such as a lay brother—is in virtue of his profession a victim, because he offers himself to God by the practice of the three vows of poverty, absolute chastity, and obedience. But a priest, even if he is not a religious, when he offers the body and blood of Christ on the altar, has a greater obligation than a lay brother or sister to unite himself in spirit to the spotless Host which he holds in his hands. Also, his incessant labour for the sanctification of souls imposes on him a similar obligation.

This duty of perfection should be taken frequently as a subject for the priest's meditation and contemplation, and also as a motive for praise: "quantum potes tantum aude, quia major omni laude."

If a religious has a special and serious obligation of striving

for perfection in view of his religious profession, with even greater reason does the same obligation hold for a priest in view of his ordination and his duties towards the sacramental body of Christ and towards the mystical body of Christ. St. Jerome wrote in the 125th letter to Rusticus: "So act and live in the monastery that you make yourself suited for the clerical state." This is quoted by St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 184, a. 8, obj. 4 and ad 4.

The author of the *Imitation* wrote as follows for a religious who became a priest (bk. iv, c. 5): "Behold, thou art made a Priest, and art consecrated to celebrate; see now that faithfully and devoutly, in due time, thou offer up Sacrifice to God, and that thou show thyself blameless. Thou hast not lightened thy burden, but art now bound by a stricter bond of discipline, and art obliged to greater perfection of sanctity. A priest ought to be adorned with all virtues, and set the example of a good life to others. His conversation should not be with the popular and common ways of men, but with the angels in heaven, or with perfect men upon earth . . ."

True, he must not turn his back on sinners, or even on those who are spiritually blind, but his dealings with them must be ruled by a friendly desire to recall them to the state of grace: "I have come to call sinners, not the just" (Matt. ix, 13). He must be priestly in his behaviour towards everyone.

#### *The proximate source of priestly holiness*

The holiness of the priest is based on the sacramental grace which he receives at his ordination. This grace, as we said earlier on, adds to sanctifying grace a modal reality which confers a right to the graces necessary to fulfil the priestly functions in a holy manner, whereas the character enables a priest to perform those functions validly.<sup>1</sup> This modal reality added to sanctifying grace is like a feature of the spiritual countenance of the priest, and it is meant to continue growing until death—in the same way as sanctifying grace and charity. On the other hand, the indelible character of the priesthood—which gives a man the power to carry out his priestly tasks validly—does not permit of growth, any more than does the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. St. Thomas, Summa, III, q. 62, a. 2, and commentators; also *Supplementum*, q. 35, a. 1.

validity itself. Sacramental grace, therefore, gives the priest a right to fresh and loftier actual graces for an increasingly holier celebration of his Mass, and he will actually receive them if he is generous and faithful to his vocation. "A special grace has been entrusted to thee . . . do not let it suffer from neglect. Let this be thy study, these thy employments, so that all may see how well thou doest. . . . So wilt thou and those who listen to thee achieve salvation" (I Tim. iv, 14-16). See also St. Thomas's Commentary on this passage.

The priest has been given five talents, which are meant to yield a profit: "The man who had received five talents came forward and brought him five talents more. . . . And his master said to him, Well done, my good and faithful servant; since thou hast been faithful over little things, I have great things to commit to thy charge; come and share the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. xxv, 20-21). But the servant who hid his talent in the earth was punished for his waste of opportunity. That is why St. Paul says: "A special grace has been entrusted to thee . . . do not let it suffer from neglect."

#### *The splendour of the priestly grace*

This must be judged from the purpose for which it is conferred—for the devout celebration of Mass and for the priest's ministry to souls. So, because of its purpose, this sacramental grace possesses a sublime character from the very moment of its conferment. Not even the angels themselves are called to this service of the altar, which is only surpassed in its dignity by the divine maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It might be asked—how is it possible for a man who is in every way inferior to the angels to receive such an extraordinary grace? Theologians reply that, just as the eagle is superior to man in possessing wings and a keener vision—although man himself is of a higher nature—so also the priest is superior to an angel in virtue of his power to consecrate and absolve, and also in virtue of his priestly grace, although angels certainly belong to a higher class of beings. Even in a small degree this sacramental grace of Orders is of outstanding excellence and as precious as a diamond.

This grace is a permanent and intimate gift of the priest. Being a modality of sanctifying grace, it is received into the

very essence of the soul, and thus exerts an influence on all its powers, sanctifying both its internal and external actions. It reveals itself in the charity of the priest, in his prudence, in his piety, etc. St. John Chrysostom has said (*De Sacerdotio*, bk. iii, c. 1)<sup>1</sup>: "Since the priesthood is so divine in character . . . who can doubt that the choicest of all graces have been allotted to Ordination?" And St. Ambrose writes in his letter to the church at Vercellae (Ep. 63, n. 64): "The life of a priest should manifest the same superior excellence as the grace of the priesthood." Generally speaking, therefore, the faithful priest receives more guidance and help and strength than do the ordinary faithful.

Denis states in his book *de Hierarch. eccl.*, c. v, n. 8: "Priests have been fully and finally prepared for sacred learning and the power of contemplation by their priestly consecration." By their priestly grace they receive a special disposition for a deeper understanding of the mysteries of faith, for the discernment of spirits, and for prayer or the raising of their mind to God.

This is not surprising, seeing that priests are called to preach the word of God and to apostolic action. Now, as St. Thomas points out (IIa IIae, q. 188, a. 6): "Sacred learning and preaching have their origin in an abundance of contemplation." In the ordinary course of events their preaching of the mysteries of salvation must spring from their life of contemplation, otherwise they will not be speaking as they should *ex abundantia cordis*. Their sermons will be nothing more than historical or apologetic commentaries, and this will not suffice for imparting the divine life to their hearers.

Fr. Olier, *Traité des Saints Ordres*, IIIe Partie c. 6, expresses a similar opinion when he says that for the comforting of the poor and the sorrowing, the priest must possess inexhaustible charity. (Cf. Fr. Giraud, II, 497.) If the priest attains to a high state of prayer, this will be of immense benefit not only to himself but also to many other souls. That is the opinion of St. Teresa, when speaking of the soul which reaches the prayer of union or the fifth mansion (c. 4). It is this grace of union with Christ which is the culmination of our priesthood rather than a host of external achievements, or the writing of books,

<sup>1</sup> This reference would appear to be incorrect, and I have been unable to trace the quoted statement. *Tr.*

or the learning which is expressed in them.<sup>1</sup> And this will be brought into effect if the priest is continually striving to imitate in his life Christ our Lord—in his way of thinking and loving and willing and acting. That was the aim of St. Paul: “For me, life means Christ; death is a prize to be won” (Phil. i, 21).<sup>2</sup> “Yours is to be the same mind which Christ Jesus shewed . . . he dispossessed himself” (Phil. ii, 5). “Arm yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. xiii, 14), “so that the living power of Jesus may be manifested in our bodies too” (II Cor. iv, 10, 11)—in other words, by a life of innocence, of chastity, of simplicity, of charity, and of all the virtues. “Our mortal nature must be swallowed up in life” (II Cor. v, 4).

This is the desire of every good priest, but even more so is it the ardent desire of Christ himself. He is far more anxious than we are to raise us up to himself: “who for us men came down from heaven and was crucified for our salvation.” St. Paul says (Gal. ii, 20): “True, I am living, here and now, this mortal life; but my real life is the faith I have in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

St. Augustine writes in his *Enchiridion*, c. 53: “The events of Christ’s life were so ordered that the life which the Christian leads in this world might be modelled upon them, not in any mere mystical sense, but in reality. For it is said of his crucifixion: ‘Those who belong to Christ have crucified nature, with all its passions, all its impulses’ (Gal. v, 24)—of his burial, ‘in our baptism, we have been buried with him, died like him’ (Rom. vi, 4)—of his resurrection, ‘that so, just as Christ was raised up by his Father’s power from the dead, we too might live and move in a new kind of existence’ (Rom. iv, 4)—of his ascension into heaven and of his sitting at the right hand of the Father, ‘Risen, then, with Christ, you must lift your thoughts above, where Christ now sits at the right hand of God. You must be heavenly-minded, not earthly-minded; you have undergone death, and your life is hidden away now with Christ in God’ (Coloss. iii, 1–3).”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. St. Bernard, who is quoted by Fr. Giraud, *op. cit.*, II, p. 518.

<sup>2</sup> As already noted, St. Thomas states in his Commentary on this Epistle that as the huntsman lives for the chase, the soldier for his military service, the student for his study, so must the Christian live for Christ alone. He must be the continual object of his thought and love.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Fr. Giraud, II, p. 512; also Fr. Olier, *l’Imitation de Jésus Christ, Traité des Saints Ordres*, III, cc. 4–5.

St. Thomas comments as follows on I Tim. iv, 14: “A special grace has been entrusted to thee . . . do not let it suffer from neglect: because he who receives grace should not be careless about its use, but make it productive of good. The servant who hides his master’s money in the ground is punished because of his sloth (Matt. xxv). Therefore, do not let the grace which is in you suffer from neglect . . .”

“Let this be thy study: so that you may always be mindful of the duties attached to your office (either of the episcopate or of the priesthood). . . . That is—think frequently of all that relates to the care of your flock. These thy employments: all your energy must be directed to that one end. And why? So that all may see how well thou doest. ‘A lamp is not lighted to be put away under a bushel measure’ (Matt. v). ‘Give proof to all of your courtesy. . . .’ (Phil. iv). Two things claim thy attention, thyself and the teaching of the faith. Some there are who devote so much care to the teaching of the faith that they pay very little attention to themselves: but the Apostle says that he should attend first of all to himself, and then to his teaching. . . . Thus Jesus began to do and to teach. Spend thy care on them: that is, keep working at them earnestly. . . . And thus your effort will yield abundant fruit. So wilt thou and those who listen to thee achieve salvation . . . ‘Starry-bright for ever their glory, who have taught many the right way. . . .’ (Daniel xii, 3). And the Apostle continues by saying: ‘Instead of finding fault, appeal to an older man as if he were thy father, to younger men as thy brothers, to the older women as mothers, to the younger (but with all modesty) as sisters’.”

In the course of his commentary on 2 Tim. iv, 2: “Preach the word, dwelling upon it continually, welcome or unwelcome; bring home wrong-doing, comfort the waverer, rebuke the sinner”, St. Thomas says: “The preacher of the word must always be preaching at the right moment, in actual fact, but, according to the erroneous view of his audience, he has to preach at the wrong moment, because the preacher of the truth is always welcome to the virtuous and always unwelcome to the evil . . . He is bound to preach from time to time to evil-minded men in order to convert them. That is why St. Paul says: ‘welcome or unwelcome.’ ‘Cry aloud, never ceasing’” (Isaias lviii).

*The universal extent of this priestly grace*

The extent or diffusion of this grace should correspond to its splendour, or to its growth in intensity. It should spread to all the virtues, to all souls, and to every part of the Church.

In the first place, the priest is meant to possess all the virtues connected with charity, together with the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, so that—in the words of the Roman Pontifical—"every kind of righteousness may shine forth in him." He should set an example of charity towards God and his neighbour, of supernatural wisdom, justice, steadfastness, mercy, fortitude. He must be upright, learned, mature in his behaviour and in all his undertakings. He should possess perfect faith and exemplary chastity. In fine, his life should be one of complete integrity so that the pleasing influence of his virtues may be a source of joy to the Church, the bride of Christ. Therefore the priest should be a man of discretion, not given to excessive laughter or speaking. His speech should be thoughtful and well-chosen, which requires a spirit of habitual silence. He will then be able to say a great deal—and something of enduring importance—in a few words.

Secondly, the universal extent of the priestly grace should reveal itself in its influence on the souls under the priest's care. The priest should give himself completely to others by devoting to them his entire strength, mind, time, and health. This he will do by means of his ministry, prayer, sacrifices, and example. In spite of all their failings the souls under the priest's care should receive his diligent attention, so that he may bring them safely through the perils of this life. He should give particular attention to the distressed and the poor—the sorrowing members of Christ's mystical body.

Finally, not even the Church suffering in Purgatory nor the Church triumphant in Heaven are excluded from the far-reaching influence of the priestly grace. The author of the *Imitation of Christ* writes in bk. iv, c. 5, n. 3: "When a priest celebrateth, he honoureth God, he rejoiceth the angels, he edifieth the Church, he helpeth the living, he obtaineth rest for the departed, and maketh himself partaker of all good things." When he celebrates with reverence and devotion he is raised up to Heaven among the unseen choirs

of angels.<sup>1</sup> In this way are verified the words of St. Paul: "Risen, then, with Christ, you must lift your thoughts above, where Christ now sits at the right hand of God. You must be heavenly-minded, not earthly-minded" (Coloss. iii, 1-2). This perfect priestly life becomes, so to speak, the beginning of eternal life: "He, in giving life to Christ, gave life to us too . . . raised us up too, enthroned us too above the heavens, in Christ Jesus" (Ephes. ii, 5-6).

In a similar way the priest is also in union with the souls in Purgatory, when he prays for them during the Mass and infallibly applies to them the fruits of the sacrifice, for he obtains for them cool repose, comfort, and release from their sufferings.

The priest who celebrates his Mass devoutly spreads terror amongst the ranks of the demons, because the eucharistic sacrifice has limitless value in resisting evil—just as much as it has in causing good. The devils find themselves face to face with an insuperable obstacle when they are opposed by the hostile and fearsome victim offered in the Mass together with his precious blood. So far as they are concerned, no better description could be given of the church in which this sacrifice is offered than that contained in the Mass of the Dedication of a Church: "This is a fearsome place: it is the house of God, the gate of heaven: it shall be named the palace of God." The devils look on the Mass as a sacrifice to be greatly feared, for they recognize only too well from its effects the infinite value of the Mass: "Thou believest that there is only one God . . . but then, so do the devils, and the devils shrink from him in terror" (James ii, 19). On many occasions souls have been freed from the grip of an evil spirit as soon as Mass has been offered for their release.

In his 17th Conference, Fr. Charles de Foucauld states that one Mass gives more glory to God than do the deaths of all the martyrs and the collective praise of the angels; for, whereas the martyrdom of men and the homage of angels have no more than a finite value, the Mass possesses an infinite value. But at the

<sup>1</sup> St. John Chrysostom writes in his treatise *On the Priesthood*, bk. vi, c. 4: "At that moment (of consecration) the Angels are present round the priest, the entire realm of heavenly powers raises its voice in praise, and choirs of Angels fill the sanctuary to do honour to him who is sacrificed." Also St. Gregory the Great, *Dialog.*, bk. iv, c. 58: "Choirs of angels are present, the low and the high consort together, earth is joined to heaven, the seen and the unseen are united as one."

same time that does not mean that one Mass would be sufficient. Each one adds something to the other, just as in the life of Christ not a single one of his theandric meritorious acts was redundant, because each of them added something to the one preceding. Every one of them had been offered by the Saviour from the very first moment of his entry into the world.

Thus we witness the universal extent of the priestly grace spreading to all the virtues, to souls in every walk of life, and to the Church militant, triumphant, and suffering. It is by this means that Christ continues to exert his influence on souls through his priests whether they are baptizing, absolving from sin, celebrating Mass, distributing Holy Communion, blessing marriages, instructing children, or helping the dying. If the ministry of priests ever ceased, the world would plunge into paganism. Priests who are apostolic and offer their Mass with purity of mind and heart are raising up "stones that live and breathe, into a spiritual fabric" (1 Peter ii, 5). They give joy to the saints in Heaven and are glorifying God almost unceasingly. They are spreading the kingdom of God and gradually destroying the evil in the world.

*Part Three*

### THE PRIEST'S MINISTRY

The third part of this work is to be divided into two sections, the first being devoted to the ministry of preaching the divine word, and the second to the ministry of confession and spiritual direction.

We will discuss the ministry of preaching under the following headings: the model of Christian preaching; the secular approach; the purpose of Christian preaching; its efficacy; essential subjects for sermons and their presentation; different forms of preaching.

*Section One*

THE MINISTRY OF PREACHING THE  
DIVINE WORD

CHAPTER ONE

CHRIST'S PREACHING, THE MODEL FOR ALL  
CHRISTIAN PREACHING

WE ought to find in this ministry a practical illustration of the principle that goodness necessarily diffuses itself, and the higher its nature, so much the more completely and intimately does it diffuse itself. This was certainly true of the mysteries of the Incarnation, Redemption, and Eucharist, and it should also be true of any form of apostolic preaching, which has continued without ceasing since the day of Pentecost. St. Peter's sermons from that day forward gave ample witness to the truth of what St. Thomas wrote in his Summa, IIa IIae, q. 188, a. 6, that preaching should proceed from an abundance of contemplation on the mysteries which are to be explained—the mysteries of the redemptive Incarnation, the Eucharist, and eternal life.

This spirit of contemplation is born of vigorous faith enlightened by the gifts of the Holy Ghost—faith which is steadfast because of divine authority, faith inspired by charity, faith which penetrates eternal truths through the gift of understanding, faith which shares the tastes of God himself through the gift of wisdom, faith which is practical and directs what is to be done under the influence of the gifts of knowledge and counsel and under the influence of the soul's devotedness to its Father which comes through the gift of piety, so that even the gifts of fortitude and fear of God are perfecting its faith. These gifts are possessed by every soul in the state of grace and are increased by the daily reception of Holy Communion. They should, therefore, be present in the priest, the preacher of the faith.

The Apostles received their commission to preach from Christ himself, and they were given the necessary grace for their work: "Go out all over the world, and preach the gospel to the whole of creation" (Mark xvi, 15). Now the Bishops are the successors of the Apostles, and they—together with the Pope—constitute the teaching Church. So to-day they themselves appoint others to go out over the world and preach the faith. Every priest with the care of souls must carry on this ministry of preaching, and for this work he possesses the graces appropriate to his position, graces which are not to be found in a layman, no matter how eloquent he may be.

Hence the priest must first convince himself that his commission to preach the Gospel has come from God through the Bishop, and that he cannot fulfil his task successfully without the aid of grace. God alone can move men's hearts and convert sinners. For that reason the priest must pray to God for the necessary grace, so that his preaching may be supernatural and fruitful.<sup>1</sup>

With this end in view, St. Thomas lays down three conditions (IIa IIae, q. 177, a. 1). He who preaches the faith must speak in such a way that the word of God enlightens the intellect, gives spiritual delight to the affections, and effectively inspires the will to be obedient to the divine commands with the aid of grace.

We would do well to consider the splendid way in which all these conditions were fulfilled in the preaching of Christ and the Apostles.

In the first place, Christ's preaching enlightened the mind of his hearers. He revealed to them the sublime mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Redemption, the Eucharist, eternal life, with the highest authority and yet with perfect simplicity and humility. Notice the wonderful union of these two extremes.

His *authority* was unrivalled and unique. "For he taught them, not like their scribes and Pharisees, but like one who had

<sup>1</sup> I know an excellent priest who has been preaching on the Rosary for many years to the spiritual benefit of innumerable souls. The secret of his amazing success lies in the fact that before he began he wrote to 150 convents of contemplative nuns, asking for their prayers and sacrifices. In consequence, his preaching has been strengthened by these prayers and sacrifices which obtain grace for his hearers.

authority" (Matt. vii, 29). He did not enter into useless wrangling over the texts of Scripture, like the Pharisees. Neither did he propose abstract proofs, such as the philosophers give. Nor did he use the tricks of oratory to compel the admiration of his audience. His statements were brief, clear, profound. They proved a stumbling-block to evil tendencies, and made a deep impression on the intellect, immediately piercing the soul through and through. They struck home like arrows, even in the most stubborn natures.

Moreover, he spoke as the supreme master: "You hail me as the Master, and the Lord; and you are right, it is what I am" (John xiii, 13): "You have one teacher, Christ" (Matt. xxiii, 11): "I am the light of the world" (John viii, 12-14). And it is in his name that we must preach. That is why he said to his Apostles and their successors: "You are the light of the world." That is to say, you must preach the need of accepting the faith because of the authority of God revealing, and for no other motive. The Christian belief is not a collection of religious opinions, which have a mere probable value and could be false. On the contrary, it is infallibly certain, entirely free from the possibility of error. It would be impossible to conceive any greater authority.

But Christ confirmed his teaching by the authority of his life, and the priest should follow his example. Very often the life of a philosopher is not in harmony with his moral teaching, whereas Christ fulfilled perfectly the precepts and counsels which he put before his listeners: "Jesus set out to do and to teach" (Acts i, 1).

Christ combined with his supreme authority *perfect simplicity and humility*—a union in one person of two widely-separated extremes which was wholly divine in its conception. Christ was too noble to be proud. He was the peak of lowness, and thus, even in the midst of all his majesty, he was a model of humility: "The learning which I impart is not my own, it comes from him who sent me" (John vii, 16): "Learn from me; I am gentle and humble of heart" (Matt. xi, 29). He did not look for the title or honours of Doctor. While the Pharisees sat in the place from which Moses used to teach, Christ preferred to preach the Gospel to the poor who were looked down upon by those who deemed themselves wise. He preached

everywhere and to all classes—on the mountain, on the shore of the sea of Tiberias, in Solomon's porch. There was no rhetorical splendour in his speech, no straining after effect. He spoke easily in parables about the highest mysteries, in a way suited to his hearers but without pandering to popular taste.

It seemed that the loftier his subject, the simpler and more sedate was his style of delivery. Divine truths were natural to him. They formed the object of unbroken contemplation, and were loved with an infinite love. But, though these treasures were possessed by Christ completely and in an unlimited degree, he proportioned them to our weakness so as not to overwhelm us. It was in this way that Christ harmonized in his preaching divine authority with simplicity and humility.

However, Christ did not merely enlighten the mind; there was also a remarkable spiritual charm about his preaching which delighted the affections of his hearers. Why? Because he spoke with overflowing emotion. The constant theme of his preaching was the supreme love of God for men. He told the crowds gathered around him: "I have come so that they may have life, and have it more abundantly" (John x, 10). The pleasing attraction of his teaching was especially evident in the eight beatitudes, in his conversation with the woman of Samaria, in the final address to his disciples before the Passion.

This supernatural charm of Christ's preaching has nothing in common with the useless sentimentality of a John James Rousseau, for example. Christ's doctrine is at once opposed to our inordinate inclinations, and yet profoundly attractive to our heart. His charm is combined with strictness, self-denial, and due severity: "If thy eye is an occasion of falling to thee, pluck it out and cast it away from thee" (Matt. xviii, 9); "If any man has a mind to come my way, let him renounce self, and take up his cross" (Mark viii, 34).

"God's word to us is something alive, full of energy; it can penetrate deeper than any two-edged sword, reaching the very division between soul and spirit . . . quick to distinguish every thought and design in our hearts" (Heb. iv, 12).

And finally, Christ's preaching was efficacious in moving the wills of men to act correctly and holily: "The words I have been speaking to you are spirit, and life" (John vi, 64). Many, in spite of great difficulties and the threat of persecution,

came to believe in him. Even the officers of the Pharisees, not daring to seize him, were forced to admit that "nobody has ever spoken as this man speaks" (John vii, 46). His Apostles defended his teaching with their blood. On innumerable occasions the morals of a whole nation have been restored by his teaching; times without number it has been the means of inspiring an ardent love of God and one's neighbour, culminating in evident sanctity and martyrdom. After twenty centuries the words of Christ still retain their original extraordinary effectiveness.

This is a very different picture from that presented by the better philosophers of the past. Rarely did they succeed in correcting the interior inclinations of men, and to-day their works are only read by a few of the learned.

Therefore the preacher of the faith should follow in the footsteps of Christ as closely as possible, so that he may be able with the aid of divine grace to enlighten, attract, and move effectively the souls of men. He must ask for this help at all times—before he preaches, while he preaches, and after his preaching. If he continues to pray, his preaching will become a channel of living water flowing down from its divine source.

## CHAPTER TWO

THE SECULAR APPROACH TO CHRISTIAN  
PREACHING<sup>1</sup>

PROBABLY the best way of grasping in a practical form the correct approach to Christian preaching is to study carefully what it ought not to be. In a similar way we have a clearer realization of the value of justice from observing the suffering which follows on injustice.

First and foremost, the preacher must be a man of tremendous faith, and it is precisely because of weakness in his faith that so many failings appear in his preaching. If it is true that belief in the word of God is expected of him who listens to sermons and instructions on the faith, with even greater reason is it true of the preacher himself.

A vigorous and discerning faith is absolutely essential for apostolic preaching. Without it, one's preaching may well be academic, but it will certainly not be apostolic. Without it, the priest is a mere orator, not a Christian preacher. Thus St. Paul finds his motive for preaching in the words of Psalm 115: "I have believed, therefore have I spoken." Cf. 2 Cor. iv, 13. It is as though St. Paul wants us to know that if he had not believed, he would not have spoken.

The reason for this need of faith is simply that the priest is not speaking as a mere man, but as the representative of Christ—in the name of God in whom he believes. His audience is composed of those who believe, or at least desire to believe. Therefore his words to them must always be guided by faith.

St. Paul says (1 Cor. ii, 4): "My preaching, my message depended on no persuasive language, devised by human wisdom, but rather on the proof I gave you of spiritual power; God's

power, not man's wisdom, was to be the foundation of your faith. There is, to be sure, a wisdom which we make known among those who are fully grounded; but it is not the wisdom of this world. . . . What we make known is the wisdom of God, his secret, kept hidden till now; so, before the ages, God had decreed, reserving glory for us." St. Thomas has an excellent commentary on this passage: "St. Paul points out that it was not his intention to rely on the persuasive force of rhetoric, but on the proof he gave of spiritual power, since that was clearly the source of his words. This he himself states (2 Cor. iv, 13); 'We too speak our minds with full confidence, sharing that same faith.' St. Paul gives as the motive of his previous remarks; *God's power, not man's wisdom, was to be the foundation of your faith*. That is, he does not intend their faith to be based on human wisdom, which so often leads men astray. He then adds: *there is, to be sure, a wisdom which we make known among those who are fully grounded . . . the wisdom of God, his secret*, so that the faithful receive later on a lucid understanding of everything which is now veiled in his preaching."

In order to confirm what we have said, we would do well to remember the disastrous effect of any preaching which is too human in character. Far from promoting the glory of God and the salvation of souls, it obstructs them.<sup>1</sup> That is to be expected when preaching is devoid of sacred eloquence. What is meant by this *sacred eloquence*? To say that a thing is sacred or consecrated means that it has been set apart for divine worship, and the more sacred the use to which it is put, the more perfect is its consecration. Thus the sacred vessels are more sacred than the chasuble or the cope; the chalice and ciborium are consecrated in the strict sense of the word and not merely blessed, because they are to contain the body and blood of Christ. The priest's fingers are also consecrated, since they touch the sacred victim of the Mass.

But after the sacraments there is nothing more divine, more sacred, than the word of God contained in Scripture and Tradition and which has to be preached to the faithful. Therefore this preaching is aptly termed sacred eloquence. Moreover, as the priest's words improve in their power of expressing a vigorous belief—which itself is an expression of

<sup>1</sup> Even in the Old Testament, Ezechiel and Jeremias had spoken of this irreverent attitude towards the divine word displayed by false prophets. So also did St. Paul. Cf. St. Francis of Sales, *Letter on the manner of preaching*; St. Alphonsus, *Letter to a religious on the way of preaching. Advice to preachers*; Ven. Joseph Frassinetti, *Gesù Cristo, regola del Sacerdote*, c. iii; Desurmont, *La Charité sacerdotale*, 3e éd., 1906, vol. II; Monsabré, *La prédication*; *Litterae encyclicaes S. Congreg. Episcoporum ac Regularium super Sacra prædicatione*, written at the command of Leo XIII, July, 1894; St. M. Gillet, O.P., *Littera ad Ordinem Praedicatorum, circa Prædicationem*.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Fr. Desurmont, *La charité sacerdotale*, II, 7.

divine wisdom and of God's love for men—so much the more perfect does that sacred eloquence become.

In the same way as the silver of a chalice is overlaid with gold, so is the ordinary rhetoric used in sacred eloquence perfected in a supernatural way. It loses many of its useless ornaments and receives higher qualities.

Since it is an eloquence to be used for preaching the Gospel to all men, it must obviously be adapted to human nature. At the same time, however, it should not be so popular as to make little or no appeal to the educated. It should also avoid being too abstract or too artificial, so that it may be understood by all, even by the uneducated. The presentation of the word of God should provide nourishment for the soul, just as material food nourishes the body. Christ desires to offer himself to us in Holy Communion under the appearance of ordinary food; similarly, he desires the word of God to be presented in a simple but splendid style, because of its subject-matter and purpose. It follows that sacred eloquence is the most perfect and yet the most difficult of all the various forms of rhetoric, since it has to propose supernatural truths in such a way that they penetrate the souls of men in every walk and condition of life.

This is a difficult task, and well-nigh impossible without divine assistance. These supernatural truths are admittedly sublime mysteries, but they are obscure, and they are just as repugnant to the pride of the human intellect as the commands of the Gospel are to the fallen state of man's desires.

It is no use merely proposing these supernatural truths and divine commands in a theoretical way. They have to be presented in such a form that they penetrate the inmost recesses of the human soul. The soul must come to realize as clearly as possible what is naturally beyond its powers, so that it will firmly believe the truths proposed and steadfastly embrace God's precepts.

Finally, sacred eloquence must have this effect on all men without exception, no matter what their condition of life may be. It must enlighten the ignorant, convince the sceptic, and induce the depraved to abandon their pleasures, their hatred, and their envy in order to turn to God.

Therefore sacred eloquence possesses of its very nature—as being something supernatural—unparalleled perfection and

persuasiveness, and is, with God's help, most fruitful with the result that its effects endure for all eternity.<sup>1</sup>

For this reason the greatest orators of all time have been the Apostles, since their preaching proceeded from an abundance of contemplation on the mysteries of salvation; for example, St. Peter on the day of Pentecost, when as the result of his preaching three thousand Jews were converted and baptized. Similarly, St. Paul, St. John the Evangelist; later on, St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine, St. Bernard, St. Dominic, St. Vincent Ferrer, St. Francis Xavier.

But sacred eloquence has one perennial foe—the spirit of secularism, which renders the word of God ineffectual and fruitless.

In considering this secular spirit which may invade the priest's preaching, Fr. Desurmont points out how in those functions of the priestly ministry which do not depend on the skill or artistry of the priest himself and which do not enhance his reputation the essential parts of the rite are always observed. Thus it rarely happens that a priest does not baptize validly, or that he does not consecrate when celebrating Mass. But it does happen frequently that when he comes to preach he does not preach as he should do—with apostolic zeal.

The reason for this is not difficult to find. A sermon is the result of the combined effort of all the priest's powers; it reveals his entire person; it is *his* struggle against the vices of the surrounding world. Everything in the priest co-operates in his preaching—study, reflection, his powers to compose and revise, the activity of his intellect, his imagination, his memory, his feelings, his voice. Therefore, when he preaches, the priest stands exposed for all to study; some will be attracted, others will not. Some will accept what he says, others will simply criticize.

So if the priest approaches his task from the human angle, he will say to himself: "I cannot afford to lose my reputation; people of weight in the parish who take offence easily must be spared their feelings and not provoked; I must proceed warily so as not to incur criticism." In that way Christian eloquence is invaded by a profane eloquence in which the preacher looks after his own interests, not the glory of God or the saving of souls.

<sup>1</sup> This is well explained by Fr. Desurmont, *op. cit.*

This human or secular approach to Christian eloquence may originate from any of the following three sources. Sometimes it is due to *a lack of faith*; the priest fails to meditate on the divine word, to study it and make it part of himself, to penetrate its meaning. He quotes the words of Scripture from memory, but they are not for him "spirit and life." He does not speak with overflowing emotion, meaning every word which he speaks; consequently his preaching is uninspiring and fruitless.

Sometimes, this profanation of Christian eloquence is due to *a want of humility* in the priest. His vanity makes him seek to please men rather than God. It is not God who directs his speech, but himself. The pulpit is used as a platform for showing off his intellect, his imagination, his voice, his skill. He does not speak of the truths which are opposed to vice, but is solely concerned with pleasing his audience and fitting in with the mood of the times. Very often this form of preaching becomes absolutely ridiculous, theatrical, and irritating.

The third source of this secular spirit in Christian eloquence is to be found in a *lack of prayer and charity*. The priest is only anxious to cut a good figure amongst his fellow men, and does not worry about the glory of God and the saving of souls. Consequently he neglects to pray earnestly for the conversion of souls. On the contrary, if he were to pray often and sincerely for this intention and if he were to ask for the prayers and sacrifices of saintly souls, his preaching would be most fruitful. That is why St. Dominic used to pray all night and do penance in preparation for his preaching the following day. His first foundation was an order of contemplative nuns, not the Order of Preachers, so that they might offer up unceasing prayer and sacrifice for the apostolate of his friars.

There are three forms of the apostolate—prayer, daily sacrifice for the conversion of sinners, preaching. Without the first two, the third will never be fruitful. From time to time God has revealed that a priest's success in his preaching has been due to prayer offered in secret by someone else. There was once a certain lay brother who was the constant companion of a famous preacher, and while this priest was delivering his sermon the lay brother would pray without ceasing. Many souls were won over to the service of God as a result of these sermons, and it was revealed to the priest that he owed his

amazing success to the sincere and humble prayer of that lay brother.

Fr. Desurmont is perfectly correct in speaking of the human approach to Christian preaching as a real scourge and disaster, for these are the only words which can be used for a prevailing and wide-spread evil which destroys life.

It is an evil which *prevails frequently*, since it can only be overcome by genuine charity in the priest, a charity which exerts its influence continually and makes itself felt in others. But, unfortunately, this kind of charity is rare. Even in Christian surroundings charity is more often than not lukewarm or inspired by purely natural motives. No wonder, then, that the preacher lapses into a careless or affected style of preaching.

Moreover, this evil of humanism in Christian preaching *spreads so easily* by being imitated. People are deceived by the veneer of success, and public opinion is by no means a safe guide in this matter. In order to remain unaffected by the usual judgment of the crowd or by the seeming success of others, the priest requires a courageous zeal and a determined character—a rare gift in the world.

Finally, the human approach to preaching *takes all the life and value out of Christian eloquence* by altering completely the tone and balance of its subject-matter—an action which is similar to that of pouring into the chalice water and a drop of wine, instead of wine and a drop of water. It is not the Gospel which is preached, but a collection of social theories which tend towards socialism. Gradually a new and false purpose is introduced into preaching. The priest does not urge his people to think seriously about their eternal salvation; his whole concern is for their temporal welfare, for the building up of an earthly paradise. One has only to think of Lamennais and his writings. The simple form of the Gospel is abandoned for the artificiality of modern elocution; the divine word gives way to a worthless fluency in speech. And in this stream of words the priest will fail to present God to his people, because he is thinking of himself only. Christ and his Gospel are not to be found in this form of preaching, just as the precious blood would not be present in a chalice where one drop of wine had been mixed with water.

In consequence, the priest will meet with very little genuine

success, since he has forgotten or does not understand these words of Christ: "It was not you that chose me, it was I that chose you. The task I have appointed you is to go out and bear fruit, fruit which will endure" (John xv, 16).

Fr. Desurmont says rightly that profane eloquence in preaching hinders the work of redemption, because Christ's words are not being observed: "You are the salt of the earth; if salt loses its taste, what is there left to give taste to it? There is no more to be done with it, but throw it out of doors for men to tread it under foot" (Matt. v, 13).

Therefore, in the words of this author, the life of souls is destroyed by this secular spirit in preaching, because they are being starved of their spiritual food of truths contained in the Gospel. Their taste is perverted, for they now prefer adulterated food—false opinions—and they cannot correct their taste, since they never hear a forceful presentation of the truth. As a result, wherever this secular approach to preaching prevails, zeal for the saving of souls is lacking.

Not only is this type of preaching fatal to those who listen to it, but it is also fatal to the spiritual life of the preacher himself. It destroys his zeal and weighs heavy upon his conscience. Such preaching is a sin which comes very near to sacrilege, since it violates what is sacred—as though one were to substitute some other liquid for the wine used in the sacrifice of the Mass. This sacrilege could be a mortal sin, especially if it became habitual. Cf. Fr. Desurmont, *op cit.*

To-day there are very few outstanding preachers who enlighten the minds of their hearers with the light of faith, or who inspire them to carry out the divine precepts and to strive for salvation. Sermons tend to be apologetic or social conferences in which the speaker is more concerned with the rational or even historical approach and makes no attempt to direct Godwards all the faculties of the souls of his hearers. He simply expounds truths after the manner of a lay philosopher, as though the faithful had long since ceased to believe; he does not preach as a genuine priest of Christ.

On the other hand, Christ and his Apostles put forward their apologetic from a supernatural standpoint, for the motives of credibility were never devised by men but by God, who, so to speak, came down to our level in order to point out

the correct way to our end in life. These motives of credibility—such as the prophecies of the Old Testament and of Christ himself, miracles, the wonderful fulfilment of all our desires—can be considered from two different angles; either from the outside and from below by those who are looking for the faith, or from above after the manner of Christ and the Apostles who adjusted themselves to the minds of those who were searching for belief. In a similar way, stained glass windows in a church may be viewed either from the outside—when their meaning will be grasped imperfectly—or from the inside of the church, when they are seen with their complete beauty and meaning. And thus, for example, rationalists study the prophecies of the Old Testament from the outside, while those who are sincerely searching for the way of belief have a better insight into their meaning and value; but their full understanding—so far as this is possible here on earth—is reserved for those who possess already the virtue of faith, enlightened by the gifts.

## CHAPTER THREE

## THE PURPOSE OF CHRISTIAN PREACHING

**I**N this chapter we will consider the end we must have in view when preaching and the relation which should exist between this end and the subject-matter of our sermons.

*Christian preaching must always be directed towards the final end of man; that is, towards the supreme love of God and the eternal salvation of souls.*

While the advocate uses all his eloquence for the temporal welfare of his client and the politician uses his eloquence for the common temporal welfare of the state, Christian eloquence must of its very nature be ordered towards the glory of God and eternal life. True, this purpose may not make such a strong appeal to the senses, but it is far loftier and strongly attracts those who are seeking God.

In an army everything—such as food, clothing, footwear, military music, entertainment—is made subservient to the final end of victory. So should the priest when preaching direct even the smallest detail towards the glory of God and the saving of souls. That was God's purpose in creating the world, and he sent his Son and the Holy Ghost for the very same purpose. In Sacred Scripture everything is intended for the final end of man.

We have already pointed out how this end is to be achieved. The word of God must be preached in such a way that it enlightens the understanding of those who believe, provides spiritual pleasure for the heart of those who hope, and inspires the will of the faithful to charity both in action and in feeling. In this way it must prove an effective means of promoting acts of the three theological virtues. It is then that a priest's preaching assumes the genuine character of *Christian* preaching.

Sacred eloquence resembles the sun shedding its light on man, whereas human eloquence—which has merely a temporal end in view—is like an artificial fire in comparison with the sun. Genuine Christian preaching is, if we may use the phrase, the

food and drink of the soul, whereas human eloquence is like sugar given to sweeten the taste.

The priest should often make this general purpose of preaching the chief topic of his sermon, frequently talking to his people about the final end of man, eternal salvation, the serving of God and his glory, death, prayer as an essential means of salvation, final perseverance, the duty of loving God and Jesus Christ, devotion to Mary as a sign of predestination and the way which leads to eternal life.

The priest should never tire of putting these subjects before his people. The soldier in battle is told that he must either conquer or die; the sailor in a storm at sea knows that he must either make port or drown. So must we preach to the faithful—either eternal happiness, or eternal punishment.

St. Philip Neri used to drive this lesson home whenever he could. One day he said to a farmer: "Francis, why are you working?"—"I want to have a good harvest."—"Why?"—"So that I may feed my family."—"But in spite of all this food for yourself and your family, death is bound to come sooner or later."—"Yes, I realize that."—"But what comes after death? Remember your catechism; you have only two alternatives after death, either Purgatory and then Heaven, or Hell. Therefore you ought to be working here and now not only for your daily food, but more especially for your eternal life."

On another occasion he was speaking to a priest, already a dignitary in the church: "And now what do you desire?"—"I would like to be an apostolic nuncio!"—"Very well, but what then?"—"Perhaps a cardinal."—"But then what?"—"Perhaps the Pope."—"And then?" The priest replied: "That is a pointless question. There is nothing more after the Papacy." "I beg to differ", was St. Philip's reply, "there is something more—death. And after death, there is either Purgatory and then Heaven, or Hell. You would do far better to desire eternal life rather than a nunciature."

For this reason the final end of man and his eternal salvation ought to form the subject-matter of the first conference in almost every retreat. Christ himself opened his first sermon on the mount with the beatitudes in order to show that eternal happiness begins here on earth; although everybody looks for happiness, not all of them realize that it is only to be found in

loving God above everything. St. Thomas begins his exposition of moral theology in the Summa, Ia IIae, with a treatise on the final end of man and the happiness of Heaven, the final end taking precedence in the order of intention. If we look for the reason why people show such little generosity in keeping the commandments and are not prepared to take the means—sometimes painful means—of attaining their life's purpose, it is because their desire for their final end is not sufficiently powerful. There is, therefore, an urgent need for the priest to preach frequently on man's final end, on loving God above all things and on eternal salvation.

Preaching loses its Christian character when it does not concern itself with eternal salvation, or when it fears to mention eternal punishment. We find in the New Testament that Christ often spoke about Hell, and the saints were never afraid to preach about it. Otherwise a priest's sermons will cease to be priestly and become purely academic. He will avoid the important truths, soften down the Gospel, and fail to lead souls to salvation.

*The priest should never fail to mention man's final purpose—eternal salvation—even when preaching on other topics*, since everything is meant to converge towards the final end. The mysteries of our faith are usually referred to as the mysteries of *salvation*, particularly the Incarnation, the Redemption, the Eucharist, and Penance. So also are grace and the virtues ordered towards salvation. No matter what subjects are chosen for sermons, they should all be treated from the view-point of their relation to eternal life—the good use of time, forgiveness of injury, restitution, the obligation of hearing Mass on Sunday, prayer as an important means of salvation, duties towards one's parents or children, duties towards one's equals or superiors or inferiors, the necessity of avoiding even venial sin. It is difficult to see how any sermon can be practical and apostolic without this bias towards eternity. Attention would then be centred on matters of secondary importance to the neglect of the one thing necessary. Furthermore, individual truths would lose their meaning and value once divorced from man's final end, rather like parts of a clock scattered over a table. After all, secondary matters only acquire importance from their relation to the primary object.

That is the plan followed by God in Sacred Scripture where the ordering of everything towards salvation is guided by charity. Certainly one does not find the logical ordering characteristic of a theological treatise, but there is a most perfect one inspired by charity.

Christ himself followed the same plan in his preaching. For example, blessed are the poor in spirit; why?—because the kingdom of heaven is theirs. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for holiness; why?—because they will have their fill, namely in heaven. Blessed are the clean of heart; why?—because they will see God. Blessed are the peace-makers; why?—because they will be called the children of God. . . . "Be glad and light-hearted, for a rich reward awaits you in heaven" (Matt. v). Notice that the justification in the practical order for each of those statements is a reference to the final end of man, which ought to have the first place in the order of intention even though it comes last in the order of execution. This argument forms the basis of all others.

Just as the principal theme of military eloquence is the love of one's country, so also the principal theme of sacred eloquence is God, the love of God, man's final end. St. John, for instance, speaks continually about the love of God and one's neighbour, almost overlooking all the other virtues: "We must love God; he gave us his love first" (1 John iv, 19). St. Paul in his turn enumerates all other virtues as being particular determinations of charity which directs them and makes them meritorious: "Charity is patient, is kind, . . . sustains, believes, hopes, endures to the last" (1 Cor. xiii, 4 and 7).

However it may be objected that people will grow tired of hearing the same truths repeated over and over again. That may well be true, but a good preacher will avoid this danger of monotony if he begins his sermon with some practical question which each of his hearers has to answer for himself. For instance, how can we overcome the many inconveniences with which we meet in our private life, in our family life, in our social life—inconveniences which we find so annoying? There is only one remedy—recourse to God, who must be loved above everything else. In this way it is possible to give a practical illustration of the relation which everything has to God—our final end—without being monotonous. Once these truths are explained

in the right way our people will not be bored but will find peace of soul in God. Do we lose our taste for bread simply because it is our daily food? Neither will the soul lose its "taste" for God, if it truly desires its sovereign good. What does tire the soul is a type of preaching which is not supernatural, is inspired by human motives, strains after effect, and thus fails to give the soul its essential food. It is useless trying to satisfy the soul with a veneer of truth and goodness which eventually proves distasteful, just as a lion could not be fed on grass.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE EFFICACY OF CHRISTIAN PREACHING

WE must first consider the general nature of this efficacy, then the results which come from ill-prepared and well-prepared sermons, and finally, the practical line of conduct which ought to be followed by the zealous preacher.

The efficacy of preaching is shrouded in mystery. For, in the first place, it depends not only on the effort put into it by the priest himself but also on the hidden workings of God's grace which has to be obtained through prayer: "It was for me to plant the seed, for Apollo to water it, but it was God who gave the increase. . . . You are a field of God's tilling, a structure of God's design" (1 Cor. iii, 6 and 9). The Apostles were simply God's workers in the field of the apostolate. Secondly, it depends on the interior dispositions of the congregation, as is well portrayed in the parable of the sower (Matt. xiii, 4); the word of God is like a seed of corn which sometimes falls on rocky land, sometimes among briars, sometimes on good soil. "The man who took in the seed in good soil is the man who both hears and grasps the word; such men are fruitful", but not to the same extent: "one grain yielding a hundredfold, one sixtyfold, one thirtyfold." And thirdly, the effects of a sermon are not always immediately evident; sometimes they come to light later on when God sees fit, on other occasions "the enemy comes and scatters tares among the wheat" (Matt. xiii, 25).

So it may easily happen that "one man sows, and another reaps" (John iv, 37). Furthermore, "he who sows sparingly will reap sparingly" (2 Cor. ix, 6), and "the men who are sowing in tears will reap, one day, with joy" (Psalm 125, 5). Jeremias sowed in tears, so also did many other prophets and apostles, and it seems at first sight that their preaching was all in vain, but they will reap the reward of their effort with joy.

However it must be remembered that preaching can only be fruitful if it is prepared. It is nearly always true that a sermon which has not been preceded by careful study and prayer does

not bring lasting profit to souls, even to those who are well disposed. At first sight such sermons may appear to have been most successful, but their success is superficial and is confined to the imagination and the feelings. Neither the intellect and its faith, nor the will and its charity have been affected, so the seeming success is only a passing phase. Even should the priest succeed in capturing the imagination and the senses of his hearers, and his sermons hurry on with growing excitement to a point where the people hardly dare to breathe, if they are not based on genuine faith and charity they cannot increase those virtues and will do no more than rouse the feelings for the time being. It is far better to speak slowly and thoughtfully with sincere faith, confidence, and charity.

In contrast, zealous preaching which has been well prepared by meditation, study, and prayer is always of great profit to souls who are well disposed, even though its efficacy may not appear at once. Time and time again it succeeds in converting the hardened sinner.

The success of this preaching is due to divine grace, since the priest is now co-operating with God himself. Hence its efficacy is immense, sometimes most remarkable; perhaps we might even go so far as to compare it with the efficacy of the sacraments, although its effects are not strictly speaking *ex opere operato*, but they do result from the divine word expounded in the course of the sermon. So that even if the priest does not possess outstanding intellectual gifts or natural eloquence, provided his preaching is inspired by great faith, hope, and charity, he will meet with amazing success—like St. Peter on the day of Pentecost, or St. Vincent Ferrer, or St. Francis Xavier, or St. John Vianney.

This zealous preaching makes use of all the good dispositions of those who are listening, both their natural and supernatural dispositions. The people come to trust and respect such a priest. It is as though Christ himself were speaking through the priest as his minister. He gives him the graces proper to his state and sometimes apostolic graces (*gratiae gratis datae*) or good inspirations to say what is best for the conversion of souls.

It is said of St. Vincent Ferrer in his Office: "He began to preach with such power and success that he led large numbers to belief in Christ and persuaded thousands of Christians to turn

from their sins to repentance, from their vices to virtue. . . . Once he succeeded in breaking the attachments of his hearers to things of earth, he incited them to a love of God."

What should be the priest's practical attitude towards the outcome of his apostolate of preaching? (Cf. Fr. Desurmont, *op. cit.*) In the first place, he must continue preaching the word of God, since this is one of the most fundamental duties of the priestly state. He was sent by Christ and the Church to preach. And when he is firmly convinced that it is the Gospel which is the word of God, he must be prepared to make the Gospel the subject of all his preaching until the day of his death, no matter what sacrifices that may entail. He must believe in the mystery and efficacy of the divine word. If ever a day should come when the priest refrains from preaching the word of God, there will begin to grow among his congregation a prevalent disregard for salvation and a lack of enthusiasm for the glory of God and the saving of souls. His church will be lifeless and inactive, like so many schismatic churches. Therefore the priest must preach God's word without interruption.

Secondly, the priest must beware of falling a victim to delusion in his preaching, discovering success where it does not really exist. This would be a serious temptation to vain glory; he would swell with pride and become—as we say—drunk with his own success. Even if his congregation were wonder-struck and tearful, it would not follow that there had been a genuine and lasting conversion. In fact, there are occasions when such external signs are lacking, and yet there is serious reflection leading ultimately to conversion. That is clearly the effect of the word of God.

Thirdly, the priest must maintain his confidence in God and in the efficacy of divine grace. There are certain times and places when depression is liable to become a serious temptation for a priest whose apostolate seems to be yielding little or no result. He preaches but nobody listens, he sows but does not reap. And so he is weighed down with sorrow.

In order to fight against and overcome this feeling of sorrow, the priest should plead for the grace of an even more steadfast belief in the efficacy of God's word. He should say to himself: when I preach the Gospel, it is not I who am preaching but God who is preaching in me and through me, and how could

this word of God be fruitless? God works in a hidden way; although results may not always come to light immediately, his actions are bound to be effective. What a privilege I have in being able to preach the word of God which cannot be otherwise than fruitful. God never speaks to no purpose, and although my sermon this morning does not seem to have any obvious effect, it sows a seed which, perhaps, will bear fruit many months later. I must keep on hoping and never judge the utility of my preaching from its apparent success or failure. "One man sows, and another reaps", as the Gospel says (John iv, 37); and it is true even of Jeremias that "the men who are sowing in tears will reap, one day, with joy" (Psalm 125, 5); they will certainly receive the reward of their supernatural labours.

All true success belongs to God; my duty is to work and to sow in his name. The efficacy of Christian preaching is certainly mysterious, but it is never in vain. As St. John of the Cross says, one interior act of pure love for God and for souls is of greater profit to the Church than a number of sermons, which though they might appear effective are inspired by less charity. St. Thomas states that Jeremias prophesied the Passion of Christ, clearly foreshadowed in his own sufferings (IIIa, q. 27, a. 6); and it was this that made his preaching so fruitful.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUBJECTS FOR SERMONS AND THEIR TREATMENT

**I**t is stated in the Catechism of the Council of Trent that the Creed, the two supreme precepts of love of God and one's neighbour, and the Decalogue form the ordinary subject-matter of preaching. In other words, we should put before our people the mysteries they have to believe and the precepts they have to observe—although these precepts will be appreciated better if we speak about the theological, cardinal and allied virtues. In point of fact every catechism presents a complete scheme of Christian preaching directed towards the eternal salvation of mankind.

However, when preaching doctrinal sermons on the mysteries of faith or on the virtues, it is important to avoid any discussion which would prove too abstract or too difficult.

In preaching about Almighty God we should explain his wisdom, his providence, his love, justice and mercy, but without entering into discussions about the problem of evil; simply say that God could never permit evil except for a greater good and give some outstanding practical illustrations of this truth.

In preaching about the Trinity we should treat of the intimate life of God, the fruitfulness of the Father through the eternal act of begetting the Son, the close union between the three divine Persons, their indwelling in the soul—but nothing about subsistent relations!

When speaking on the Eucharist we should concentrate on the Real Presence and Holy Communion, saying little about transubstantiation and the accidents of the Eucharist.

When preaching about eternal salvation, we should speak of final perseverance, Heaven, Hell, Purgatory, but make little reference to predestination as it is liable to give rise to misunderstanding.

In brief, as stated earlier, the priest should treat of all the subjects of his sermons from the standpoint of their relation to man's final end. For instance, he should view detraction in the

light of God's judgment; he should consider obedience in its bearing on salvation, and the birth of Christ in relation to our obligation to love and glorify him. He must speak frequently about the three theological virtues, which have as their immediate purpose God himself who is our final end, and about the double precept of love of God and one's neighbour which gives light and life to the Decalogue, just as charity is the form of all the virtues giving them their meritorious value.

However, if the people are weak in their faith, it would be more profitable to speak to them about the reality of the future life rather than about eternal salvation as such, and about the divinity of Christ rather than about his love for us. Apologetic sermons are essential where faith is none too strong. But this type of preaching can become superficial and ineffectual if the priest does not realize clearly the purpose behind such sermons. He will not be working for the salvation of souls even indirectly, if his will is not sufficiently set on that ideal.

#### *Subjects for retreat conferences*

Although this list is intended primarily for retreats to religious, it could be used for other retreats. The subjects suggested have as their principal theme progress in the spiritual life from the point of view of its four causes—

- (1) The final end to be achieved.
- (2) Sin which impedes progress towards this final end; and confession.
- (3) Christ's redeeming love for us—the mystery of the Redemption.
- (4) Our love for God—the supreme precept and Holy Communion.
- (5) Love of our neighbour.
- (6) Penance and self-denial, which are essential for progress in charity.
- (7) Humility as opposed to the pride of life, and its effects.
- (8) Evangelical poverty as opposed to the concupiscence of the eyes.
- (9) Christian chastity as opposed to the concupiscence of the flesh.
- (10) Obedience in opposition to the spirit of insubordination.
- (11) The carrying of the cross in imitation of Christ.

- (12) Prayer of petition, liturgical prayer, the Mass.
- (13) Mental prayer and its fruitfulness.
- (14) Docility to the Holy Ghost and his gifts.
- (15) Devotion towards the Blessed Virgin Mary.
- (16) Zeal for the glory of God and the saving of souls—the apostolate.

Other suitable subjects for retreats—

- The interior life as a ceaseless conversation with God.
- The three theological virtues considered individually.
- The cardinal virtues, and those which are related to them.
- The seven gifts of the Holy Ghost.
- The indwelling of the Trinity in the souls of the just.
- The influence which Christ exercises as head of the mystical body.
- The influence of Our Lady.
- The increasing of grace by merit, prayer, and the sacraments.
- Fruitful confession.
- The Mass as a source of holiness.
- Holy Communion.
- The different purifications of the soul and intimate union with God.

#### *The composition of sermons*

The entire construction of a sermon must be ruled by the purpose for which it is intended—the conversion of those who will be listening. The eloquence of the preacher and the effectiveness of his sermon are dependent on this ordering being observed. Rhetoric is the art of persuasive speech, and sacred rhetoric is intended to persuade people primarily of the need for turning to God.

*The beginning.* Right from the very outset it is important to capture the attention of one's audience by putting before them some vital and fundamental question which is going to be considered throughout the entire sermon, so that the final solution will not be given in its entirety until the end. In this way the priest ensures the unity of his sermon by choosing a leading idea. When presenting the question it is essential to give in a clear and practical form the precise difficulty which has to be solved, or the obscurity which has to be dispelled by a gradual enlightenment of the mind during the sermon.

For example, should we wish to preach on the duty of loving God above everything else in the world, we could begin by pointing to the large number of people to-day who love themselves first and foremost. They reveal their self-love in their unwillingness to resist the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life, and it is this spirit of self-gratification which causes strife between individuals and families, and wars between nations. What is the remedy for all this unhappiness? One thing is quite certain; no solution will be found if men continue to love themselves rather than truth, justice, and God himself who is the source of all truth and goodness. By putting the opening question in this practical form it should prove possible to claim the attention of those who are present. One good preacher used to say that a priest should begin his sermon by drawing a picture of men groping in the dark, of widespread confusion, or of some great evil which ought to be avoided. His people would thus appreciate better the urgent need to receive the light of truth and to embrace the real good. In other words, he begins by pointing out that although all men desire happiness, many of them seek it where it is not to be found. But what does the Gospel have to say about true happiness? We are not surprised to find that Christ himself began his preaching by talking about happiness.

Another example: if the priest wishes to exhort his people to hope in God, he could begin by showing how the majority of men alternate between presumption which takes its rise in pride, and depression which comes from failure. The inconveniences which result from these moods are obvious. What then is the remedy? The virtue of hope in God which prevents these troublesome effects of presumption and despair by raising a man above the passing events of this life.

In order to preach on justice it would be as well to begin by giving a brief summary of the intolerable evils which follow from injustice. The more a man knows about the suffering caused by injustice, the more he appreciates the need and value of justice. On the other hand, if the opening words of the sermon are a plea for the observance of justice in one's everyday life, many of the congregation are liable to say to themselves: that's all very well, but we have heard that appeal thousands of times before and there are very few who pay any heed to it. Now

if everybody else acts unjustly, how can I be expected to do otherwise?

It is important, therefore, to present the question or difficulty to be solved in a practical form, as St. Thomas does at the beginning of all his articles. He points to the difficulty by drawing up a list of objections. The preacher can then be sure of capturing the attention of his audience, even if he is not particularly eloquent. From that point onwards the whole sermon should be so arranged that the final and complete solution is reserved for the end. To give it earlier will be to lose the attention of the people. No one will continue to listen to the second part of the sermon if the climax has already been reached in the first.

It is impossible to over-emphasize the importance of a good beginning to a sermon. It used to be said that there were three sources on which the priest could draw for the theme of this opening; the subject itself by presenting the main difficulty which has to be solved in the course of the sermon, the contrary opinion which has to be refuted, or sometimes the prevailing circumstances by considering some event which is taking place at the time of the sermon and to which the sermon is related.

The method of St. Vincent de Paul could also be used when preaching on one of the Christian virtues—

(1) The nature of this virtue—for example, humility—by contrasting it with behaviour which masquerades under the same name, and with the vices opposed to the virtue which are themselves contrary to each other (such as pride and faint-heartedness).

(2) The motives which prompt us to possess this virtue—our relations with God and with our neighbour, and the need of this virtue for salvation.

(3) The means which enable us to practise this virtue frequently—for example, in the ordinary circumstances of everyday life, and when something unexpected happens. The advantages of this virtue.

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*The principal argument.* Once the prologue is prepared we can proceed with the composition of the body of the sermon. But here we must remember that it is the essential point of the

sermon which has to exert the chief influence on the faculties of those who will hear it, so that everything else is secondary and must be made to support the main argument and not overshadow it.

The priest would do well to imitate the example of a good Christian mother in her effort to reconcile her children after a quarrel. She chooses her words carefully for the end she has in view, and does not urge them to forget their quarrel before she explains why they ought to forgive each other. So, too, the priest; if, for instance, he wants to bring sinners to confession, he should give his reasons first before exhorting them to repentance.

As a general rule the body of the sermon ought to appear in the form of a clear argument or syllogism, of which the major is a truth well known by everyone and the minor a truth which has to be developed or explained.

For example, everyone must pray if prayer is an important means of salvation. But according to Sacred Scripture prayer is such a means, since it is through prayer that the soul opens itself to the influence of grace which God desires to give us, but which he will not force on souls that prefer to obstruct its flow. Therefore everyone must pray.

Another example, we must forgive injury if God has commanded us to do so. But God has commanded the forgiveness of injury over and over again, promising his mercy to those who themselves are merciful. Therefore, if we want to obtain God's mercy, we must forgive injury.

Another example, the chief petition of all our prayers should be for the grace which is most essential for salvation. But the grace which is most essential for salvation is the grace of a happy death, for which the soul prepares itself by turning away from creatures to God. Therefore we must ask with special insistence for this grace and prepare ourselves for it.

Arguments such as these are easily understood by all and are convincing, provided that the hearers do believe. But even those who have little faith may find themselves convinced by one or other of the points mentioned in the course of explaining the argument. It is in this way that the word of God will be made to penetrate not only the intelligence of the people but also the inmost recesses of their souls; it will enlighten them,

afford them spiritual pleasure, and move them to conversion. The priest who preaches in this way and speaks with overflowing sincerity possesses the gift of eloquence.

More often than not the priest can presume that the major proposition of his argument is known and accepted by everyone, since it reveals its own truth immediately. That being so, he concentrates on the explanation and development of the minor. Let us suppose that he wants to urge his people to go to confession before the feast of Easter and not to keep putting it off from one year to the next. He will build up his argument as follows—

If to remain in sin for any length of time is rash and without rhyme or reason, then the sinner should immediately turn to God without delay. But it is extremely rash and unreasonable to remain in sin for any length of time. Therefore he should turn to God at once.

There is no need to delay over the major, since it is so evident. All one's attention and powers of persuasion must be given to the development of the minor, in order to make quite clear the recklessness and madness of delaying repentance from one year to the next. What the priest must do is to wear down the stubborn resistance of the sinner, who must be made to realize the force of the argument for himself, so that he will say: "this is perfectly true, I am a fool and my recklessness has brought me to the brink of spiritual disaster." And then we may hope that with the grace of God the sinner will be won over from his evil life.

The minor can be proved by two parts of the sermon, first, by showing the risk involved in constantly delaying one's return to God, since death may come at any moment; and, secondly, by pointing out that such behaviour is unreasonable and the height of foolishness.

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*The conclusion*, which makes itself known gradually in the course of the sermon, is clearly stated in the peroration. In this way the attention of one's audience is held until the very end by the principal idea or theme, which at the outset was presented in the form of a difficulty that had to be solved; for example, many people are extremely careful about their

temporal affairs—their health, their business, their will—and yet they are not in the least perturbed by the postponement of their confession from one year to the next. Is that the right way of living? The people will listen and wait for the final answer which is reserved for the end of the sermon.

More often than not the priest is speaking to an audience of men and women who are ignorant in matters of religion and distracted by their life in the world. To help them understand the main argument of the sermon the major must be absolutely certain and the minor very carefully explained, otherwise they will not grasp the force of the conclusion, and will come away unmoved.

In order to make the conclusion convincing the priest should give a brief summary of his argument, make it obvious that the conclusion applies to each one of his hearers, and exhort them to resist their passions and obstinate moods. Therefore the peroration must be marked by charity and a zealous desire for the conversion of those who are present, because the priest's eloquence cannot be sincere and fruitful without that zeal.

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Should the sermon consist of two parts or more? Certainly there must always be a short introduction, a body to the sermon, and a conclusion. But sometimes it may be just as well to divide the body of the sermon into two or three parts, although this is not always necessary, especially if the sermon is short. In this case the major will already be obvious and the minor will not need several explanations but one which is clear and convincing.

Thus, for instance, when preaching on the effects of Holy Communion the priest will divide the body of his sermon to correspond to the different effects of this sacrament; it is the food of the soul, a remedy for the ravages of sin, strength against future temptation, and it gives a spiritual delight in the service of God.

Another example, the sacrament of Confession was instituted by God, first, because no one but God could have thought of such a sacrament or have had it accepted by men; secondly, because if it had been instituted by some man or woman, it would have provoked such violent discussions that history would

have recorded the event; and thirdly, because we have the testimony of Scripture and Tradition to show that Christ himself instituted this sacrament and no one can refute that testimony (cf. John xx, 23): "Receive the Holy Spirit; when you forgive men's sins, they are forgiven, when you hold them bound, they are held bound."

Bossuet divides a sermon for religious on the observance of silence as follows: the introduction refers to the dissensions caused by sins of the tongue—the body of the sermon treats of three kinds of silence, the silence laid down by the rule of the Order, the silence dictated by prudence in conversations with others, the silence of patience in times of suffering or contradiction—and the conclusion corresponds to the opening question.

*The type of argument to be used and the development of the principal argument*

While unity must be preserved at all costs, the sermon has to be so arranged that it appeals to all the faculties of the listener and not merely to his intellect, in order to obtain his conversion to God. For this purpose the priest should use as a general rule three types of arguments: an argument based on the authority of God's revealed word in order to appeal to the faith of his hearers; a rational argument or one drawn from commonsense in order to appeal to their reason; an "emotional" argument, one which is directed to the affective part of their intellectual and sense nature, so that the conclusion combined with God's grace may inspire their will to follow out some practical resolution. It may also be useful to show the falsity of erroneous opinions, if the priest knows that they are being propagated amongst his people and are disturbing their minds.

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The principal argument of the sermon has to be developed and enlarged, but very often younger priests do not know how this is done. When they repeat exactly the same argument over and over again in synonymous terms, they multiply words unnecessarily as the sermon hurries towards its emotional climax in their anxiety to imitate the ardent charity of the saints. But the people are given no time to think, hardly time to breathe,

and they quickly tire. They go away with confused, undefined emotions which do not have any noticeable results. True, such preaching may sound like a melodious hymn of praise but it fails to produce the all-important prayerful effect of hymns already known, such as the "Spiritual Canticles" of St. Alphonsus.

How should the argument be developed? (Cf. Fr. Desurmont, II, p. 53). Now although Logic is essential for the purpose of proving a truth it is bound to be too theoretical by itself, and so requires to be supported by examples. Aristotle himself has pointed to the necessity of this form of development in his books on rhetoric. Otherwise, sin remains in its logical dress as evil but does not appear as a fearful monstrosity; Hell is presented as a punishment but not as a hideous torment; God as the Supreme Being but not as the supremely attractive Good. Logic by itself is never sufficient to produce the salutary effect which the argument is meant to have on the people listening. For that purpose the argument has to be enlarged, so that the truth may appear in all its reality and importance. So, for example, it must be shown how a life of virtue means the beginning of the happiness of Heaven and a life of sin brings nothing but unhappiness, so that anyone listening will say to himself: "This actually happens in real life far more so than ever I thought."

We have always to remember that there is no more constricted truth in our mind than divine truth, the truth of the Gospel, since this is infinite whereas the human mind is extremely limited. While we find it easy to recognize that a plague is a great evil it is not so easy to realize that mortal sin is a great evil, far greater than a plague. It is a truth which lies fallow in the mind, a truth which is abstract and not sufficiently practical (cf. Fr. Desurmont, II, p. 54). And thus the people are not effectively convinced by the conclusion of the sermon, they never *realize* its truth. But if the priest were to take these eternal truths as subjects for contemplative prayer, he would find no difficulty in convincing his people that sin is the greatest of all evils.

The development of the sermon must be adapted to the end which the priest has in view. For instance, if he is trying to urge sinners to great confidence in Our Blessed Lady he must

explain what is meant by devotion to Our Lady and the general motives for this devotion; but he must also lay special emphasis on the motives which appeal to sinners, showing by the aid of examples how Mary is the refuge of sinners, the gate of heaven, the morning star, the health of the sick, the comfort of the sorrowful, the help of Christians, the patroness of the dying, a terror to Satan and his angels, especially at the hour of death. This skill in developing and enlarging a theme is not easy to come by. The mere use of synonymous words is clearly insufficient; the argument has to be enlarged by additional facts. Thus, to show that impurity is a fearful plague of the soul, the priest must explain its nature, its causes, its effects, and its frequent attendant circumstances. First, its nature: it is an excess of venereal pleasure which lowers man's spiritual nature to what is base and degrading. Secondly, its causes: these are the inclinations of man's fallen nature, the temptations of the devil, and habit which may make the failing almost incurable. Thirdly, its effects: it proves a continual burden to conscience, it corrupts a man's intellect, his will, his imagination, and all his finer feelings, it gradually undermines his health and leads to all kinds of unpleasant diseases, it results in a hatred of God and finally in damnation since the man's one desire is to satisfy the desires of his flesh. Fourthly, its attendant circumstances: it frequently destroys the good repute of even public figures, it incites men to sacrilege, and sometimes makes them the wretched and ignominious slave of some prostitute. It is obviously a most fearful plague and leads a man into the depths of unhappiness. This is the correct way to develop the main argument and it will also be convincing.

We will take another example, where the priest is urging his people to fulfil their Easter duties, to go to confession and receive Holy Communion. Now the development of his arguments should always be in accord with the supernatural end which he has in view. Thus, it would be wrong to insist on the fulfilment of the Easter precept merely for the sake of pleasing one's devout wife or beloved daughter or of preserving one's good name and personal authority. The only result would be a merely natural conversion. Such motives are secondary and should only be used to prepare the people for something much higher. It is the supernatural motive of love of God and of

eternal salvation which has to be put forward as the sovereign reason for obeying the precept. This motive has then to be explained in such a way as to excite acts of the three theological virtues, living faith, hope of eternal happiness, sincere love of God.

Just as a musician or a painter or a sculptor have to know the secrets of their respective arts if they are to succeed, so also the preacher of the Christian faith, otherwise he cannot produce the desired effect. Each man has to know how to become skilled in his own particular sphere and then put his skill into practice. It would not be fitting for a jurist or a philosopher to want to preach, but the priest himself is expected to know the secrets of genuine apostolic preaching.

*Style in preaching* (cf. Fr. Desurmont, II, p. 58)

Style is defined as a special manner of speaking and writing. There is the style proper to a lawyer, the style of the soldier, the style of the historian, the style of the philosopher, an emphatic style, and so on. The style is the man, expressing what a man is. Thus Christ had his own style, so had St. John the Evangelist, St. Paul, and St. Peter.

What should be the style of the preacher? It ought to be a style inspired by charity. Why? Because style must correspond to the interior character of the speaker, and the dominant trait of the priest's character must be charity and zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. This is the genuine style of the priest and the apostle, as distinct from that which is characteristic of the philosopher or of the soldier. And the supreme model of this style is to be found in the Gospel.

Charity demands that the style of preaching be expressive, well-balanced, brief, precise, simple, suitably illustrated, and accompanied by a fervent enthusiasm.

The style has to be *expressive*, because it is the vehicle of supernatural truth and has to imprint this truth on the minds of a varied audience. For this reason it must be logically arranged in a way which everyone can follow and which is based on the nature of the matter which forms the subject of the sermon. After all, the priest should possess an overwhelming desire to give the truth to his hearers, and to put his desire into effect his style must express clearly what he wants to say. For instance,

Jesus Christ has conferred on each one of you immense benefits. But a benefactor ought to be thanked, and gratitude leads us to love the person whom we thank. Then why is Jesus Christ so little loved by men?

Furthermore, the principal word or phrase of a sentence ought to be made to stand out and given special emphasis; for example, the greatest of all our benefactors is *God* himself.

In order to be expressive the style must be well-balanced, brief, precise, and simple. It should be *well-balanced* by avoiding all useless repetition and unnecessary words, which simply make for a verbose style.

Secondly, it ought to be *brief*—sentences should be short and avoid the excessive complexity of oratorical periods, as in the following examples taken from St. Augustine: “God who created you without your co-operation will not save you without your co-operation.” “God does not ask the impossible; his commands are meant to exhort you to do what you can and to intercede for what is beyond your power.”

Avoid circumlocution by using always the appropriate word or phrase. On the other hand, there is the danger of becoming too concise and thus making one's meaning obscure and enigmatical. The style should be *precise*; that is, the priest should reflect carefully on the exact word to use when expressing the principal theme of the sermon. For this purpose it is recommended that at least the main part of the sermon be written down. If the language of the sermon is precise, the truth will be made perfectly clear and obvious to all.

Finally, the style ought to be *simple*, within the reach of his audience, and yet not excessively popular. It is by this means that the word of God moves wills to action, because a simple style does not detract the attention of the audience from what is being said to the way in which it is said. In this it differs from an artificial or affected style, one which is excessively polished. A simple style is natural and forceful, and brings elocution into the service of truth and charity.

The illustrations used in sermons should be as simple as those in the parables. Mortal sin is likened to a fatal illness, venial sin to a transitory sickness which can lead to something more serious if it is not attended to. Another way of arresting attention is the use of antithesis, pointing to the apparent

opposition between God's mercy and his justice, between humility and magnanimity, between fortitude and meekness. God reveals the power of his grace by effecting a supernatural harmony between these qualities which are so widely diverse.

And then there is also required a *fervent enthusiasm* inspired by the Holy Ghost through the gift of piety, which makes us look to God as the kindest Father we have, to Jesus Christ as our Saviour and friend, to Mary as our mother in Heaven, to Heaven itself as our home country, to Hell as the worst horror in the world. This earnest enthusiasm should not be forced but prudent and sincere.

The preparation of notes beforehand is an invaluable help to the memory. In the actual delivery of the sermon a frequent use of question and answer will guard against monotony, and the sermon then assumes the form of a conversation with the people. Gestures should be simple and spontaneous, and in harmony with the subject of the sermon. Everything must be made subordinate to the spirit of apostolic charity.

## CHAPTER SIX

### DIFFERENT TYPES OF SERMONS

**T**HE principles of sacred eloquence never alter, but they have to be adapted to the various types of Christian preaching—to the sermon properly so-called, the panegyric, the ordinary parochial instruction, the homily, and the catechism for children.

In the usual type of *sermon* all the rules we have discussed relating to composition and to style should be observed in their entirety. In a *panegyric* the principal rule to follow is to make it useful for the ordinary life of the people by drawing their attention to the saint's virtues which they themselves can imitate. Moreover, the priest will find it easier to talk about the interior life of the saints if he first speaks about their faith, then about their confidence in God, and finally, about their charity for God and their neighbour. The reason for this order is that generally speaking faith and hope are presupposed to charity, and in the life of the saint there first appears the perfection of faith, then the perfection of hope, and finally, the perfection of charity. That is certainly true of the life of St. Thérèse, and of the lives of the martyrs. Another method of approach is to discover what the saint received from Christ. This was the method adopted by Bossuet in his panegyric on St. John the Evangelist and he divided his panegyric accordingly. Christ gave him his heart at the Last Supper, his mother on Calvary, and his cross for the fruitfulness of his ministry.

The *parochial instruction* should be delivered in the manner of a friendly talk, at the same time making certain that the actual instruction with its practical applications is not overshadowed by any other part of the sermon. A *homily* on the Gospel of the day cannot be divided up in the usual way, but the explanation of the verses of the Gospel should be directed towards some well-defined conclusion. In *conferences*, on the other hand, certain points of history or of apologetics or of speculative theology can be developed at much greater length than is possible in the ordinary sermon to the people.

The style of the *catechetical instruction of children* must always be conversational and interesting. Questions should be asked in order to retain their attention; instruction and encouragement must be given. The priest must make use of stories and illustrations not chosen at random but selected for their appropriateness to the end which he has in view.

*Retreats* to the diocesan clergy and to religious must pay particular attention to the special obligations of their respective states.

For the normal type of *mission* preached in Christian countries sermons are required which are adapted to the circumstances and carefully arranged amongst themselves relating to man's final end, the fear of God, the theological virtues, confession, Easter duties.<sup>1</sup> There should also be special instructions for young girls, for mothers, for men. A mission is, so to speak, a battle which the apostle wages for the conversion of sinners and then for their perseverance.

What is the plan recommended for a successful mission, according to the laws of psychology and of grace?

There must first be an intense preparation of prayer offered by the missioner himself, by souls consecrated to the service of God, and by those to whom the mission is to be preached. The opening of the mission is then devoted to disposing the people to listen to the great truths of salvation. This must be done with kindness in order to win their confidence and to move them to pray to Christ our Saviour and Our Blessed Lady. Artificial enthusiasm or excitement are to be carefully avoided; it usually results in disillusionment later on. Special appeals should be made to wives to bring their husbands along, and children should be encouraged to come so as to bring their parents with them. Sometimes it is useful to open with some striking ceremony, such as the setting up of a special statue in honour of Our Lady or of a large crucifix. Visits to the sick are also recommended.

The second part of the mission should consist of sermons on the eternal truths—eternal salvation, sin, death, the particular judgment, Hell, God's mercy—, on some of the chief vices such as impurity and injustice, on the theological virtues, on the sacrament of Penance—sincere confession, contrition, firm

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Fr. Desurmont, II, 436.

purpose of amendment, avoidance of the occasions of sin. Prayer should be offered in public, in the family, and in private for the conversion of every soul to God; it should be pointed out how dangerous it is to delay one's conversion. Special services could be held for the dead of the parish, and a public act of reparation made to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The people should be given every opportunity of going to confession.

The third part of the mission will concentrate on the principal obligations of a Christian who is now resolved to dedicate himself to the service of God: prayer—he who prays is saved, he who does not pray is condemned—, keeping Sunday holy, frequent reception of the sacraments, careful education of children, respect for one's parents, resisting temptation, good intention, generous acceptance of the cross in daily life, conformity to the will of God, love of one's neighbour. Other sermons could be preached on the Christian family, on the need of trust in God's Providence for those who try to fulfil their obligations, on devotion to the Mother of God as the mother of mercy.

The fourth and final part of the mission will be devoted to the gift of perseverance which is obtained through prayer and to the daily fulfilment of our various duties. The mission should conclude with a sermon on the erection of a mission cross and the indulgences attached.

\* \* \*

The first objective of *missionary work in pagan countries* must be the conversion of unbelievers to the faith and to the initial purification of their heart. Prayer must be offered daily for this intention. From the outset the missionary should speak fearlessly about Jesus Christ, his holy Mother, and the final destiny of man. But under no circumstances should a pagan be baptized until he is sufficiently well prepared. Then gradually the missionary can lay down the foundations of a Christian family, of a Christian parish, and of a Christian society.

\* \* \*

*In retreats given to lay people* the main subjects of the conferences ought to be the final end of man, the conversion of the soul to God, prayer, the obligation of one's state, perseverance: cf. the

Exercises of St. Ignatius and of St. Alphonsus, and the Retreats of St. Vincent de Paul.

*Priests on retreat* should observe complete silence, cease from all their usual occupations, and be alone with God. They should pray together, renew their devotion to Jesus Christ by adoring the Blessed Sacrament and to Our Blessed Lady by renewing their act of consecration, and they should offer prayer in public for all their fellow priests.

Subjects for prayer and meditation during these retreats should include man's final end, priestly perfection, sin, death, judgment, Jesus Christ priest and victim, the theological virtues, chastity, mental prayer, perseverance, apostolic zeal, priests' societies and conferences. These latter are extremely useful for priests living in isolated districts; without them it would be like trying to cross a rough sea in a skiff. The retreat conferences should be doctrinal in character, based on Scripture, Tradition, and the accepted teaching of theologians. The priest giving the retreat ought to speak like a person engaged in serious conversation with his friends. At the very outset he should state with all due respect and charity that priests can be divided into three main categories—the virtuous, the lukewarm, the unfaithful—and each one has to adapt the retreat to the state in which he finds himself at that moment. Reference should be made in the course of the talks to each one of those groups. The unfaithful priest who is open to despair must be encouraged to hope and confidence.

In retreats to seminary students special emphasis must be laid on the priest's vocation and its obligations.

### Section Two

## THE PRIEST'S MINISTRY AS CONFESSOR AND SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

### CHAPTER ONE

#### THE PRIEST'S MINISTRY IN THE CONFESSIONAL

ONE will sometimes hear a distinction made between preachers and confessors as if those who preach need not give much attention to the priest's ministry in the confessional, a work which is often less satisfying, more difficult, and sometimes irksome. However, a priest who does reserve all his energy for the pulpit and very little for the confessional is bound to find his preaching abstract and theoretical; his sermons will lack variety and he himself will not display that sincere and profound zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls which comes from practical labours for the conversion of souls.

To hear confessions well requires patience, self-denial, great love for souls. At the same time two extremes have to be avoided: excessive kindness and undue severity.

Some of the faithful no longer go to confession because they have found a confessor so tolerant of their failings that they have gradually ceased to realize the gravity of mortal sin. They look on confession as a mere formality with little value for their moral life. They have lost their supernatural appreciation of the value of confession; is that surprising, when the confessor himself is without that same supernatural outlook? Others—and these are in the majority—no longer go to confession because they have found their confessor too severe. And yet the faithful who confessed their sins to St. John Vianney were not deterred by his firmness, since his charity was even greater. He would sometimes readily inflict a severe penance on himself in place of the penitent in order to help him.

It is generally true to say that a priest who is careful about his

own confession makes a good confessor for other people. But just as a person who has never learned how to obey never makes a good ruler, so also a priest who is careless about his own confession does not know how to hear the confessions of others.

St. Alphonsus (*Praxis confessarii*, c. 1) explains that a good confessor is a father, a doctor, a teacher, and a judge. These are universally accepted as the four aspects of a priest's work in the confessional.<sup>1</sup>

*As a father* the confessor must be blameless in his priestly life, wise, mature in his judgment; he must possess abundant charity, showing himself equally kind to all—to the poor, to the uneducated, to the greatest sinners. He must receive them all with patience, gentleness, fatherly love, saying to them: "Trust me completely and tell me of the state of your soul. Do not fear. God is only too willing to forgive you all your sins if you are sincerely sorry. That is why he has waited for you, in order that he might spare you." If that is the attitude adopted by the priest, the penitent will realize that he is kneeling before a genuine father.

*As a doctor* the confessor needs that priestly prudence which will guide him correctly in asking questions about the source of the penitent's spiritual ills, so that he may suggest suitable remedies, protect the "sick" person against future dangers, warn him to avoid the occasions of sin and to make necessary restitution, and so on.

*As a teacher* the confessor must have sufficient knowledge of theology, so that he never loses sight of the great mysteries of salvation—the redemptive Incarnation, eternal happiness, eternal punishment—nor of the two supreme precepts of love of God and one's neighbour, which provide the supernatural approach to the Decalogue and its applications. Therefore the priest must never cease from his study of moral theology, especially of the more frequent cases and censures.

*As a judge* the confessor will sometimes have to ask questions, so far as is necessary for the integrity of the confession; he must also decide whether to give or to refuse absolution. For this purpose he must judge correctly the gravity of sins, their nature, and the state of the penitent—whether he is sufficiently

<sup>1</sup> The following five paragraphs appear in the original at the end of Chapter Six, under the heading *Recapitulatio*, but they seem to be more appropriate here. Tr.

attrite or not. He must also impose a penance proportionate to the offence committed, but which is not beyond the power of the penitent to fulfil.

These various duties of a confessor demand numerous virtues—a spirit of faith, confidence in God, great charity, priestly prudence, justice, courage, and also steadfast chastity in order to help those who fall into frequent sins of impurity. Fruitful perseverance in this ministry requires a fervent zeal for the glory of God and the saving of souls; otherwise the priest is overcome by weariness and may even reach a stage where he acquires an aversion for souls. For this reason unlimited charity and sincere apostolic zeal are indispensable virtues—as St. Alphonsus repeats so often in his excellent work, *Homo apostolicus*, tr. 16 and 21.

#### *The duties of a confessor<sup>1</sup>*

The confessor must help the penitent to make an integral confession, a sincere act of contrition, and a firm purpose of amendment; he should also give suitable advice.

*Integrity.* The priest is recommended to make a practice of questioning any penitent who comes to him for the first time, unless the penitent is clearly well instructed, precise, and has already said on his own initiative everything that is necessary. The questions should normally bear upon the penitent's state in life; for example, whether he is married or not, his age, his occupation, the date of his last confession.

It is also useful to ask the penitent about the more common types of sin and their causes, if he has not been sufficiently explicit. In order to discover whether he may be hiding some sin of a more serious nature of which he is ashamed, the priest should put the following general question: "Is there anything else weighing on your conscience, anything at all which you would like to get off your mind?" If there is no reply, that is a sign that he still considers himself blameworthy in the sight of God, and he must then be helped with care and discretion to reveal what may be of a serious nature and altogether necessary for the integrity of his confession. In such cases the priest should ask explicitly about those sins which may probably have been committed by the penitent in his or her state of life, and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Fr. Desurmont, *op. cit.*, II, 130.

implicitly about other more serious sins which could have been committed.<sup>1</sup>

In dealing with the virtue of purity the priest must formulate his questions in such a way as to be readily understood by the guilty, and yet they must be sufficiently veiled and discreet as not to offend the innocent. For instance, if the penitent confesses an act which of its nature produces culpable pollution, the priest must not ask whether pollution actually took place. This question must never be put to women.

*Contrition and amendment.* In helping the penitent to make a sincere act of contrition and a firm purpose of amendment the confessor must be guided by his priestly charity, and avoid being too lenient or too severe. He should remember that here he will receive much assistance from the sacramental grace of Orders, which is a modal determination of sanctifying grace and therefore of charity, and entitles him to increasingly higher actual graces in hearing confessions.

When a penitent is not sufficiently disposed to receive the sacrament, priestly charity urges the confessor to do all that he can to obtain sincere sorrow and a firm purpose of amendment. It guides him in the use of all his powers of persuasion, and while the priest is thus trying to help the penitent, so is Christ helping his minister. In fact, without this profound confidence in Christ's help at that moment, the priest would never succeed in his efforts to urge or make acceptable the necessary spirit of contrition. The priest's voice alone, without God's help, could never dispose a penitent. What is required in such circumstances is a supernatural eloquence, brief and to the point, convincing and full of charity. He must say to the penitent: "My child, try to appreciate the evil you have committed. What evil has God done to you that you should despise his authority in this way? If Jesus Christ had been your greatest enemy, could you have treated him more abominably than you have done? It was out of love for you that he sacrificed his life on the cross to save you from eternal punishment—and see what you have done and said against him in return. What will happen to you if you persevere in your refusal to make a humble

<sup>1</sup> Cf. St. Alphonsus, *Praxis Confessarii*; and St. Charles Borromeo in the course of his instructions: *Quae in ministracione sacramenti Poenitentiae parochus et confessarius observet.*

submission to God, if you do not ask for his grace of sincere contrition and amendment? Then again, what good have you obtained from all your sins? You are simply preparing yourself for a life of unhappiness here on earth and the loss of eternal life. Remember the words of Christ: 'Come to me, all you that labour and are burdened; I will give you rest' (Matt. xi, 28). God has so far given you time for conversion—do not delay any longer. Together with me you must intercede from the bottom of your heart for the grace of conversion, so that you may be genuinely sorry and receive through absolution the grace of contrition and of firm resolve to co-operate with God's help in the avoidance of sin for the future."

That is how saintly priests have always succeeded in moving their penitents to sorrow for sin, thus avoiding laxity and jansenistic severity.

The confessor who possesses genuine priestly charity readily absolves all sinners who are well disposed for the sacrament or in whom he cannot find any sign of insufficient dispositions. And those who are not properly disposed he tries to move to sincere contrition.

If there is any doubt about the penitent's resolve to avoid sin in the future, the priest should not refuse him absolution unconditionally but promise to give it when the penitent is better disposed. A case in point would be when the priest is doubtful about the dispositions of those who have contracted habits of sin, of those who frequently fall into the same sin after repeated confession and without any effort at emendation, and of those who are in the occasions of sin. Cf. St. Alphonsus, *Praxis confessarii*, c. iv.

*The habitual sinner* may be absolved as often as he seriously undertakes to employ the means necessary to overcome his habit, but he cannot be absolved if he refuses this undertaking.

*The recidivist* is one who frequently falls into the same sin after repeated confession, without making any effort to avoid the sin. He differs from the habitual sinner who often falls into the same sin but has not yet confessed his sinful habit. The absolution of these recidivists presents difficulties, since they cannot all be treated in the same way. There are those who repeatedly commit sins due to a malicious will (*recidivi formaliter*), and those who repeatedly commit sins due to frailty (*recidivi*

*materialiter*). These latter should be given advice and encouragement, and then absolved. As regards the former, St. Alphonsus, who steers a middle course between severity and excessive leniency, states that as a general rule they are not to be absolved unless they give special signs of their sorrow.

Then there are those *penitents who are in occasions of sin*—either in a free proximate occasion, if it is one that could easily be avoided, or in a necessary occasion, if it cannot be avoided. A penitent unwilling to avoid a free proximate occasion of sin cannot be absolved; but one who is in a necessary occasion of grave sin may be absolved if he seriously intends to take the necessary measures to make the occasion a remote one. The priest's charity will here be invaluable in pointing out the correct path to follow, which will avoid laxity on the one hand and rigorism on the other.

## CHAPTER Two

### SPIRITUAL DIRECTION IN GENERAL

In this chapter we intend to consider the general nature of spiritual direction and the qualities needed for a good director. Other chapters will be devoted to the direction of beginners, of the proficient, and of the perfect;<sup>1</sup> special attention will be given to the direction of contemplative souls (cf. St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa). The final chapter will treat of the discernment of spirits.

#### *The moral necessity of spiritual direction*

A confessor is not intended merely to rid the penitent of his vices but also to conduct him along the way of perfection and to help him grow in virtue. Such has been the constant teaching of the saints; for instance, St. Alphonsus (*Praxis confessarii*, c. 9): "One perfect soul is more acceptable in God's sight than a thousand imperfect ones. So when a confessor finds a soul whose life is free from serious faults he should take all possible care to lead such a soul into the way of perfection and of divine love. Let him bring home to that soul how deserving God is of all our love, and the gratitude we owe to Jesus Christ who has loved us to the extent of laying down his life on our behalf. He should also point out the danger to which a soul exposes itself by resisting a special call from God to a more perfect way of life."

Therefore spiritual direction is one of the normal means of progress in virtue and of arriving at intimate union with God.

That has been the testimony of the saints; for example, St. Basil, St. Jerome, St. Augustine. All of them say: "No one is an impartial judge in his own case because each man judges according to his own particular inclination", and it is precisely this inclination which we have to try to correct; we have to avoid all the temptations and deceptions of the devil.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, a priest has the graces proper to his state for giving

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Saudreau, *Degrees of the Spiritual Life*, and St. Alphonsus, *Praxis confessarii*, c. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Cassian, *Collationes*, II, 14, 15, 24.

wise direction not to himself but to those who ask for it. This is also proved from experience by the frequent occasions on which temptations and deceptions have lost their force once revealed to a director. For this reason St. Bernard says that novices in the religious life need a spiritual guide to direct, encourage, and help them. He says: "it is easier for me to direct others than myself" (*Sermo VIII, 7*); "Self-love leads us astray" (*Epist. 87, n. 7*).

St. Vincent Ferrer expresses a similar view in his work *De vita spirituali*, Part II, c. 1: "Our Lord Jesus Christ, without whom we can do nothing, will never grant his grace to a person who has the opportunity of going to an experienced director but refuses this valuable means of sanctification on the grounds that he is quite capable of deciding for himself what is useful for his salvation. . . . He who has a director, whom he obeys unreservedly, will reach his goal in life far more easily and quickly than he would if he relied on his own powers, no matter how keen his intelligence or how good the books he chose for spiritual reading. . . . As a general rule it is those who have followed the path of obedience who have attained perfection—except those souls who have been unable to find a spiritual director, to whom God has granted the special privilege of being directly instructed by himself."

St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, St. Francis of Sales are all of the same opinion. St. Francis writes, in his *Introduction to the Devout Life* (Part III, c. 28), that no one can be an impartial judge in his own case because of a certain self-complacency "so secret and imperceptible that it remains hidden to those who suffer from it."

St. Alphonsus in his excellent book, *Praxis confessarii* (nn. 121–171), indicates the principal objects of spiritual direction: mortification, the dispositions required for receiving the sacraments, mental prayer, the practice of virtues, the sanctification of ordinary actions.

All these testimonies emphasize the general need of direction. As we will show later on, this necessity is all the more apparent at a time of trial, especially during the passive purification of the senses which leads to the illuminative way of the proficients, and during the passive purification of the spirit which marks the passage to the unitive way of the perfect.

### *The qualities of a good director*

St. Francis of Sales says that a good director "must be full of charity, of knowledge, and of prudence; if one of these three qualities be wanting in him, there is danger."<sup>1</sup> Knowledge is required of the spiritual life and of the means which lead to union with God: prudence is essential for the practical application of principles to the individual being directed: fervent charity is required so that the director inclines his will towards God and not towards himself, leading souls to God and not to himself. This spirit of sincere and fervent charity is opposed to sentimentality which is merely a pretence of love existing in the emotions and hardly at all in the will.

St. Teresa expresses the same opinion in her *Autobiography*, c. 13: "It is of great importance, then, that the director should be a prudent man—of sound understanding, I mean—and also an experienced one: if he is a learned man as well, that is a very great advantage. But if all these three qualities cannot be found in the same man, the first two are the more important, for it is always possible to find learned men to consult when necessary. I mean that learning is of little benefit to beginners except in men of prayer. I do not mean that beginners should have no communication with learned men, for I should prefer spirituality to be unaccompanied by prayer than not to be founded upon the truth. Learning is a great thing. . . . From foolish devotions may God deliver us."<sup>2</sup>

The spiritual director's charity must be free of all desire for personal advantage; he must not attract souls to himself but to God. Tauler is most insistent on this; some directors, he says, are like hunting dogs who eat the hare instead of bringing it back to their master. They are then beaten with a whip or a switch.

The director's charitable kindness must not be allowed to degenerate into weakness or slothful leniency. It must be firm, courageous, fearless in speaking the truth, in order to be effective in leading souls to perfection. He must not waste time in useless conversation or letter-writing, but go straight to the point in directing a soul towards holiness of life.

<sup>1</sup> *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Part I, c. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Reproduced from Allison Peer's translation, by kind permission of the publishers—Sheed and Ward.

Therefore a director must be well acquainted with ascetical doctrine, with the traditional teaching of the well-known masters of the spiritual life on the right road to follow to union with God. Moreover he ought to be a competent psychologist—especially if he has to direct persons suffering from hysteria, psychasthenia, or neurasthenia. He should be acquainted with the type of mental troubles which result from such ailments as hypertrophy of the thyroid gland or of the endocrine glands, especially during the critical age. These disorders sometimes cause chronic and progressive poisoning which gives rise to mental confusion accompanied by fixed ideas.<sup>1</sup>

In order that the Holy Ghost may use the director as his instrument in sanctifying a soul, he must prudently discover in that soul the predominant fault which has to be destroyed and the special supernatural attraction which has to be encouraged. For this purpose he must pray for guidance—especially in difficult cases—and if he is humble, he will receive the graces proper to his state. He will learn to incite some souls to greater effort and to restrain the enthusiasm of others who tend to confuse sentimentality with genuine love of God, which can only be proved by good works.

When a priest is directing generous souls there are two opposing dangers which his prudence must avoid: that of wishing to lead all pious souls swiftly and indiscriminately to contemplative prayer, and that of thinking it a waste of time to consider this question. Neither too much speed, nor too little. The directed soul should be scrutinized to see whether it shows the three signs of the passage from discursive meditation to contemplation, as described by St. John of the Cross in the *Dark Night of the Soul* (bk. I, c. 9) and by other spiritual authors. Until those signs appear, the soul should be told to be docile to those inspirations of the Holy Ghost which do not conflict with its vocation in life.\*

#### *Duties of the person being directed*

These duties follow naturally from what we have said about the nature of spiritual direction and the obligations of the director. The person being directed must show respect, sincerity, and docility towards the director.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Robert de Sinéty, S.J., *Psychopathologie et direction*, Paris, 1934.

\* See footnote at end of chapter.

In order to have that respect the penitent ought to avoid harsh criticism and over-familiarity. His respect should be accompanied by a filial affection which is frank and spiritual, which avoids even the slightest trace of jealousy towards any other souls under the spiritual director's care.

To be sincere and perfectly open the person being directed must not try to conceal anything from his director, neither his good qualities, nor his faults, nor his imperfections.

Finally, he must be extremely docile: otherwise, he is more likely to be following his own will than the will of God. However he would be quite justified in pointing out the serious difficulty involved in carrying out the advice given. If the director does not change his opinion, his counsel must be followed. Admittedly he may be wrong but the person being directed cannot go wrong in obeying him, unless the advice is contrary to faith or morals. He must then seek another director.

Only a grave reason justifies a change of directors. Inconstancy, pride, false shame, curiosity, impatience are not sufficient motives. However a change is warranted if the director's views are too natural, if he displays too much emotional affection, or if he lacks the necessary knowledge, prudence, or discretion.

Apart from such cases it is important to maintain a certain continuity in direction so far as this is possible, in order to persevere along the same road. Therefore it is the height of folly to leave a good spiritual guide simply because he justly reprobates us for our own good. We should remember the advice of St. Louis, King of France, to his son: "Choose a wise and virtuous confessor who will tell you what to do and what to avoid, and give him complete freedom to reprove and correct you." This is a form of affection which is good, holy, fearless, and unspoilt by that sentimentality which is nothing more than an affectation of true love.

Under these conditions the spiritual director will become the instrument of the Holy Ghost in recognizing the promptings of grace and in urging the directed soul to respond to those inspirations with increasing promptitude. This is the way whereby souls avoid "the wide road that leads on to perdition" and make progress along "the narrow road that leads on to life" (Matt. vii, 14). This narrow road is continually widening

to become eventually as broad as the infinite goodness of God to which it leads, whereas the wide road of perdition gradually narrows to become as restricted as Hell which is its terminus. While neglect makes the soul endure the terrible confinement of Hell, the narrow way of sanctity allows the soul to enjoy the perfect freedom of the sons of God—freedom from all disordered judgments and desires—and the fulness of eternal happiness.

Spiritual direction, if conducted along the lines indicated, reveals the wonderful effectiveness of the good priest's charity, knowledge, and prudence. He well exemplifies the words of Christ: "It was not you that chose me, it was I that chose you. The task I have appointed you is to go out and bear fruit, fruit which will endure" (John xv, 16).

(\* Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange clearly implies that such "inspirations" would not be genuinely from the Holy Ghost if they were to conflict with one's vocation.—Tr. note.)

### CHAPTER THREE

#### THE DIRECTION OF BEGINNERS<sup>1</sup>

**S**Piritual directors must make it their care to instruct beginners on the necessity of mortification, the correct approach to the sacraments, and the means to avoid negligence or spiritual sloth in prayer.

##### *Mortification*

In mortifying inordinate desires—the breeding ground of vice—there are two extremes to be avoided: continual lack of mortification which makes the soul lukewarm and remiss in its efforts for perfection, and excessive zeal in the practice of exterior mortification.

As St. Alphonsus wisely remarks (*Praxis confessarii*, n. 146): "Some spiritual directors would measure all spiritual progress by the degree of exterior mortification. . . . Others look askance at every form of this type of mortification seeing in it a stumbling-block to spiritual progress, and they make the attainment of perfection dependent on interior mortification. But these are no less mistaken in their view than the first, since corporeal austerities are a help to interior mortification and when they can be practised they are in some degree essential for the restraint of our sense-faculties. And so we find them present in the lives of all the saints to a greater or less extent."

What, therefore, is the principle to be followed? St. Alphonsus states it in these words: "Interior mortification is more important, but exterior mortification is extremely useful."

Hence, in practice, penitents are to be urged chiefly to interior mortification of their ill-ordered passions; for example, not to reply to insults and ill-treatment—unless there is a higher and more excellent motive for so doing—not to reveal

<sup>1</sup> Cf. St. Alphonsus, *Praxis confessarii*, c. 9, Part iii, n. 145, 147; Part iv, nn. 148–155; Saudreau, *The Degrees of the Spiritual Life*, English tr., vol. 1, bks. 1–3; and the author's previous work, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, English tr., vol. 1, pp. 258 ff.

anything to others which would make them think well of them, not to look for possible sources of praise from others, to give way in argument so as to avoid pride, ill-feeling, hankering after the things of this world, praise, and one's own will. It cannot be doubted but this is the more essential form of mortification.

At the same time the utility of exterior mortification must not be overlooked. St. John of the Cross used to say that anyone who despised corporeal penances was not to be trusted, even if he performed miracles.

St. Philip Neri shared the same view: "A man who never restrains his appetite cannot attain perfection." St. Alphonsus gives the following advice to a nun desiring perfection: she must scourge herself daily but not to the point of drawing blood except once or twice a month, and her sleep ought always to be limited to six hours, frequently to five. Nowadays, however, seven hours would be allowed.

The better forms of mortification are those which are negative in character: for instance, not to look at or listen to things which excite our curiosity, to be reserved in conversation, to be content with food which is not very palatable or is badly prepared, not to approach the fire during the winter, to choose for oneself things of less value, to rejoice in the lack of even necessary possessions—this, incidentally, being the true meaning of poverty. As St. Bernard says: "The virtue of poverty is not the actual poverty, but the love of poverty for the sake of imitating Christ." Again, one should not complain of the daily inconveniences of life, of the annoyance caused by some bodily infirmity, of being scorned or persecuted by other people: it is suffering and contradiction which perfect the future citizens of Heaven. St. Teresa used to say that it was folly to think that God would admit anyone into his friendship who was in love with his own ease.

Special attention must be given to the mortification of the penitent's predominant fault which is like a worm that gnaws its way into the soul.

#### *Reception of the sacraments*

Those who are trying to lead a spiritual life should confess frequently, at least once a week.

Frequent—if possible, daily—Communion is also recommended.<sup>1</sup> But their preparation for this sacrament must gradually become more and more perfect, because as a general rule each of our Communions increases our charity and thus disposes us for a better Communion on the following day, provided there is no culpable negligence.

St. Francis of Sales explains this need of frequent Communion in his *Introduction to the Devout Life* (Part II, c. 21): "There are two kinds of people who ought to communicate often: the perfect . . . (so as to remain perfect); and the imperfect so that they may be able to attain to perfection; the strong lest they become weak, and the weak that they may become strong." And the pseudo-Ambrose states in his work *De Sacramentis* (Part IV, c. 6, n. 28): "Since I am always falling into sin, I am in constant need of the divine remedy"; because, as St. Thomas explains (IIIa, q. 79, a. 4), "venial sins are forgiven by the act of charity caused by Holy Communion."

What is the fundamental condition for a fervent Communion? It is a sincere spiritual hunger for the Eucharist, a hunger which proceeds from the soul's living faith and firm confidence in Christ and also from its love for him, even if sensible fervour is lacking.

If a person approaches the sacred banquet with this fervent desire for the bread of life, his Communion daily becomes more fruitful, just as a stone increases its speed as it moves towards the centre of the earth. The contrary is true of a person who develops a growing affection for venial sin; his Communions become less fruitful, in the same way as a stone which is thrown up into the air gradually loses its momentum.

Finally, the director must see that his penitents devote a suitable amount of time to their thanksgiving after Holy Communion. There are even many priests who make little or no thanksgiving after their Mass.

St. Alphonsus (*loc. cit.*, n. 155) lays down the following rule: "Ordinarily speaking, one's thanksgiving should be of an hour's duration; certainly it should never be less than half an hour, during which time the soul will make frequent acts of love and petition. St. Teresa says that after Holy Communion Jesus

<sup>1</sup> This will always bear fruit provided it is received "with a pious and upright intention," Pius X.

exists in the soul as if he were sitting on the throne of mercy, eager to enrich the soul with his graces, saying: 'What would you like me to do for you?'

During the day the soul should adopt the practice recommended by the Council of Trent of making a spiritual communion. Its advantages were recognized by St. Teresa: "Do not overlook the making of a spiritual communion which is of such benefit to the soul. It shows the extent of one's love for God." St. Alphonsus made it a rule for a nun to communicate spiritually at least three times during the day (*loc. cit.*, n. 156).

#### *Prayer*

The spiritual director must exercise special care to prevent beginners from neglecting mental prayer. He must instruct them on the way to meditate on the eternal truths and on the goodness of God, for this is essential if the soul is to continue in the grace of God. Mental prayer and sin cannot exist together. "The soul", says St. Alphonsus (n. 122), "must abandon either prayer or sin. St. Teresa was quite certain that a person who persevered in prayer, no matter how violently the devil tempted him to sin, would assuredly be led by God to the harbour of salvation. For this reason, the devil is never so anxious as he is to obstruct this spiritual exercise, because he knows, as St. Teresa says, that he has lost the soul which perseveres in prayer." The saints have often described prayer as the furnace in which is enkindled the flame of divine love.

To quote St. Alphonsus again: "The director must, therefore, introduce the soul into the way of prayer. At the beginning he should not specify for the exercise any longer than half an hour, and then as the soul develops, this period will be increased to a greater or less degree." He should recommend frequent meditation on the four last things, especially on death, which is more useful for beginners: "Remember at all times what thou must come to at the last, and thou shalt never do amiss" (*Eccles.* vii, 40). But the most fruitful of all subjects for meditation is the Passion of Christ.

Beginners should imitate the practice of St. Teresa and always use some spiritual book for their meditation. They should be advised by their director to choose those subjects which incite them to greater devotion, and to pause and dwell

on those points which make a stronger appeal to their affections, so that they may make penetrating acts of faith.

Meditation should not occupy the whole time of mental prayer. The soul must turn aside from reflection to acts of the will, making a complete offering of itself to God in acts of humility, confidence, and love. Mental prayer proceeds from the three theological virtues which unite us to God and from the virtue of religion, aided by the gift of piety.

The exercise will then conclude with a request for perseverance in conforming one's will to the divine will. And to ensure that this period of mental prayer has an effect on the beginner's daily life he must formulate some practical resolution: as, for instance, to avoid one or other of his more frequent failings and to practise some virtue in which he knows himself to be weak.

Afterwards the director must ask whether his advice has been followed or not.

When souls establish themselves in prayer they find it extremely difficult to renounce their original conversion to God. Hence even sinners ought to be encouraged to pray, because it is often for want of reflection and of love for God that "like a dog at his vomit, the fool goes back to his own folly" (*Prov. xxvi*, 11).

\* \* \*

There is one period when the director will have to exercise special vigilance over the mental prayer of beginners, and that is during the time of aridity, of spiritual desolation, which is the normal trial preparatory to progress.

When the soul first dedicates itself to the spiritual life, God usually encourages the beginner by granting him special favours and sense consolations. These are of great benefit to the soul, but beginners are apt to develop a kind of spiritual gluttony for them. And so at that point God usually brings to an end this flow of sensible fervour in order to test the fidelity of beginners and to bring them to a purer form of love for the giver instead of for his gifts. The result is a period of sensible aridity. During this time God often allows a series of temptations against those virtues connected with our sense nature, against chastity and patience, so as to give beginners an

opportunity of offering generous resistance and of acquiring new merits. According to St. John of the Cross this period of aridity, when prolonged and accompanied by spiritual progress, coincides with the passive purification of the senses, which marks the passage of the soul to its "second conversion", to the illuminative way of proficients, in which begins infused contemplation proceeding from the virtue of faith enlightened by the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

What is the duty of the director during this period of trial? He must do all in his power to encourage the soul to remain faithful to its prayer and Holy Communions. Let him remind beginners of the words of St. Francis of Sales: "A single prayer in times of desolation is of far more value before God than a hundred offered during periods of consolation." He who loves God because of his favours loves the favours rather than God himself; on the other hand, a person who loves God and remains faithful to him even when deprived of all consolation is showing a true and sincere love.

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Beginners must also be urged to sanctify their daily actions.<sup>1</sup> In the morning they must offer the entire day to God, both its actions and its sufferings. Throughout the day the soul must be almost continuously recollected so as to avoid thoughtlessness, idle curiosity, waste of time, excessive interest in the things of this world. St. Francis of Sales praised St. Jane Chantal for her practice of making an ejaculatory prayer at the beginning of every hour of the day in order to consecrate it to God.

Useful to this exercise of sanctifying our daily actions is the orderly arrangement of our various occupations so as to leave sufficient time for Mass, mental prayer, spiritual reading, and visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

#### *Retarded souls<sup>2</sup>*

Some beginners never mature in their spiritual life, never reach the illuminative way of proficients, for one or other of the following reasons.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Saudreau, *op. cit.*, I, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Saudreau, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 38-41; and my earlier work, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, I, p. 461.

Sometimes they pay little attention to details in the service of God and thus forget the words of Christ: "He who is trustworthy over a little sum is trustworthy over a greater" (Luke xvi, 10). So, for example, a religious who is most faithful in observing his rule in all its details will receive the grace of martyrdom, if an occasion should arise when he has to suffer death for the sake of Christ. St. Augustine points out that although a small thing is in itself of little value, yet to be continually faithful to God's law even in its smallest details is of the highest value. We gradually come to realize the wonderful significance of our many small duties, which ought to be ordered towards our final end in a spirit of faith and love of God. Once beginners grow careless about details in the service of God they will begin to grow careless about things of greater moment. Remember that a year is made up of days, days of hours, and hours of minutes.

Eventually this negligent soul no longer seeks God in everything that it does but self; it loses all sense of the presence of God. On the other hand, a soul which is faithful even in small matters realizes gradually the full supernatural importance of the least—and, a fortiori, of the greatest—of all its duties.

Another cause of the stunted growth of beginners in the spiritual life is their unwillingness to offer to God the sacrifices which he demands of them. "Would you but listen to his voice to-day! Do not harden your hearts." There are many people perfectly willing to do all that they can in the world to make a name for themselves, but they pay little attention to the sanctification of their own soul: "How is a man the better for gaining the whole world, if he loses himself, if he pays the forfeit of himself?" (Luke ix, 25). But some beginners refuse to make the effort; they lose their seriousness of purpose and become spiritually slothful. Perhaps that which prevents the soul from lifting itself up from earth to heaven is an attachment to some useless frivolity for the sake of the pleasure we derive from it, an attachment which though it may be no stronger than a piece of thread is effective in keeping our heart fixed to the earth; "such witchery evil has, to tarnish honour, such alchemy do the roving passions exercise even on minds that are true metal" (Wisdom iv, 12).

A third reason for the retardment of certain beginners is a

tendency to derision, when they begin to make fun of the man of virtue as reflecting on their own inferiority. And thus their outlook on the spiritual life becomes warped. Job replied to the carping tongue of his friends: "The simplicity of the upright was ever a laughing stock" (Job xii, 4). But this derision of earth is answered by the chastizing irony of God: "He who dwells in heaven is laughing at their threats . . . his fierce anger will hurl them into confusion" (Psalm ii, 4 and 6).

Unfortunately, there seem to be *many* beginners who do not mature in their spiritual life; they are neither beginners nor proficients nor perfect souls. They resemble abnormal children who never grow; though they do not remain children, they never develop to maturity and become dwarfs.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE DIRECTION OF PROFICIENTS<sup>1</sup>

WE will first consider the passage of the soul from discursive meditation to contemplation, then the direction of souls at that period, and finally, the faults of such advanced souls.

#### *The soul's second conversion*

According to St. John of the Cross (*The Dark Night*, I, c. 9) the spiritual director should attend to three signs which indicate the transition of the soul from discursive meditation to the beginning of infused contemplation. This higher form of prayer is not to be attributed to the soul's own efforts aided by sanctifying grace but to the virtue of faith perfected by the gifts of the Holy Ghost: that is to say, it results from a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, a special grace under the influence of which the soul does not move itself but is moved by the third Divine Person (cf. St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q. 111, a. 2).

The three signs are the following. In the first place, the soul is experiencing sensible aridity and finds no consolation either in divine things or in any thing created. Taken by itself this sign would be insufficient, since it might proceed from a fit of depression. But when considered in conjunction with other signs it indicates to some extent the influence of the gift of knowledge, which enables the soul to recognize the vanity of all created things.

The second sign which marks the entrance of the soul into the illuminative way is that in spite of this aridity it never forgets God; it retains a keen desire for perfection and fears that it is falling back in its service of God. Here is evident proof that the present state of the soul is not caused by depression or tepidity, and it reveals the influence of the gifts of fear and piety.

And the third sign of the soul's readiness for the beginning of infused contemplation is that it can no longer practise discursive meditation but finds pleasure in a simple loving attention

<sup>1</sup> Cf. my previous work, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, English tr., I, p. 260; St. Alphonsus, *Praxis confessarii*, c. 9, par. II, IV.

directed towards God. This is a sign that God is beginning to enlighten the soul with a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost. This simple regard, which is centred on God, proceeds from the virtue of faith illumined by the gifts of knowledge and understanding and—at least in a hidden way—wisdom.

Souls which manifest these three signs are undergoing the passive purification of the senses, a second conversion, during which they are weaned from all attachment to sensible consolations in order to come to a more spiritual and generous love of God. This is the crisis of the soul's spiritual transformation.

There are some who show themselves most generous in passing through this crisis and thus they enter the illuminative way of proficients, which is called by St. John of the Cross "the way of infused contemplation" (*The Dark Night of the Soul*, bk. I, c. 14). Others are less generous and are never completely successful in reaching the illuminative way, but remain to some extent retarded souls. As a result they will sometimes return to discursive meditation when they do not accept the gift of initial infused contemplation: at other times they happily accept this gift for a brief period.

#### *Spiritual direction during the passive purification of the senses<sup>1</sup>*

During this time of aridity spiritual persons are not to long for the return of those sense consolations of which they are being deprived. On the contrary, they must be freed from this spiritual gluttony, from this excessive desire for consolation. Neither must they devote themselves to methodical and discursive meditation when this has become a well-nigh impossible task. This would be like running to the spring when the soul has already arrived at that spring of water "that flows continually to bring him everlasting life" (John iv, 14). Or as if when reading we were to behave like children who count the letters in each word, when in fact we can take in several words together at a single glance and read without difficulty.

The soul must continue to trust in God and not despair, neither must it cease from prayer as though its effort were of no avail. On the contrary, prayer is never more fruitful than during this period of trial, so long as the soul perseveres in

<sup>1</sup> Cf. St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, bk. I, c. 10. Also, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, vol. II, p. 54.

a spirit of humility, self-denial, and trust in God. True, this is a "narrow road" but it leads to a higher form of life. The soul is then in the fortunate position of having to make *intense* acts of humility, faith, hope, and charity. It should never forget that this passive purification of the senses has to be endured either here on earth while there is the opportunity of merit or after death in Purgatory, when merit is no longer possible. Hence this trial of aridity in prayer is nothing unusual in the development of the soul towards sanctity, and it must simply place all its trust in God.

During this period the soul should rest content in a confused and general knowledge of God and in affective love, making acts of confidence and love of God. For it is now at the end of discursive meditation and on the threshold of contemplation. However, should this general and confused awareness of God disappear, the soul should once again take up its former practice of meditation—especially on the life and Passion of Christ—or else return to a slow affective meditation on the "Our Father," as outlined by St. Teresa.

Finally, proficients must be prepared to bear patiently all the accompanying trials of this state, such as temptations against purity, the loss of sensible comforts, ill-health, opposition from one's fellow men.

#### *The faults of proficients*

Spiritual directors must take note of certain faults which are proper to the soul in the illuminative way: these may be either habitual or actual.<sup>1</sup>

Habitual failings which affect the intellect are distractions, a constant wandering of the mind away from God to creatures, unwillingness to forgo one's own opinion, an authoritative attitude in ruling others, or the opposite failing of extreme leniency towards those who oppress the weak.

Faults to be found in the will are an innate love of self and an unbridled attachment to spiritual consolations.

Actual or occasional faults of the intellect are the mistakes made in matters relating to the spiritual life; for example,

<sup>1</sup> St. John of the Cross speaks of these failings and afflictions in *The Dark Night of the Soul*, bk. II, c. 7 and 8. Cf. *op. cit.*, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, English tr., II, p. 356.

erroneous judgments about visions and revelations. Actual faults affecting the will are presumption, ambition, pride or arrogance.

These defects are all the more insidious as they may be mistaken for acts of virtue and not recognized for what they really are.

Because of these faults and imperfections proficients must undergo a second purification—the passive purification of the spirit. The inner recesses of their soul have to be finally purified by the light of the gift of understanding.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> St. John of the Cross discusses this need in the opening chapters of the second book of *The Dark Night of the Soul*.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE DIRECTION OF PERFECT SOULS

WE must first discuss the passage of the soul from the illuminative to the unitive way, and secondly, the direction of the soul during that period.<sup>1</sup>

#### *The soul's third conversion*

The soul passes from the illuminative to the unitive way through the dark night of the spirit, which marks the soul's third conversion and is a new spiritual crisis. At this moment the soul is enabled by the gift of understanding to recognize the grandeur of God and its own wretchedness, as when God said to St. Catherine: "I am he who is and you are that which is not." This new spiritual light reveals the splendour of God's holiness and at the same time all the hidden defects of the soul—even the most insignificant. The soul thus suffers extreme torment, since this spiritual light from the gift of understanding is overpowering and more like darkness, just as the brilliant light of the sun is blinding to the night-owl.

During this period the soul suffers violent temptations against faith, hope, and charity, since the devil is anxious to make use of this spiritual darkness to bring the soul to despair. The soul is then in the happy position of having to make intense and extremely meritorious acts of the three theological virtues.

The signs of this passive purification are the following. The first is that the soul is unable to accuse itself of committing fresh faults and yet it does not know whether it deserves God's love or his hatred. It is grievously afflicted by the fact that it no longer experiences the divine help.

The second sign of this spiritual crisis is that the soul continues for longer periods without committing even the smallest fully deliberate venial sin and has lost all desire for created things, thus revealing its extraordinary habitual love of God.

And the third sign of this purification is that the soul now

<sup>1</sup> Cf. St. John of the Cross, *loc. cit.*; St. Francis of Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, bk. IX, cc. 3–16; St. Alphonsus, *Praxis confessarii*, c. 9.

enjoys continuous contemplation and the highest love of God in spite of its spiritual aridity. This brings to light its immense actual love of God. And in this way the soul is prepared for a most intimate union with God.

*Spiritual direction during this spiritual purification<sup>1</sup>*

Souls who have reached this stage in the spiritual life have their will perfectly conformed to the divine will. They must now pray to God in all humility and confidence for the grace to persevere in this spiritual night of sorrow. For this purpose they should also invoke the aid of the saints, especially of St. Thomas as the Doctor of truth, asking him to bring them light in this darkness. He is known to have listened frequently to similar prayers.

They should not attack their temptations directly but, so to speak, ride over them, turning to God for the actual grace to overcome them. They must regard it a privilege to wage such a glorious struggle in the divine cause and one which is so highly profitable to the soul.

Their love of God must be a pure love of friendship, showing themselves ready to accept his good pleasure in all respects, following the example of Job: "through the hours of darkness, I await the dawn" (Job xvii, 12). In this way the soul attains to a courageous love of God even when deprived of all spiritual consolations. They become sharers in the sorrowing life of Christ.

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How are souls to be helped after this period of purification, especially if God calls them to a life of reparation for sinners? Certainly he will then ask them again to endure great suffering. Although St. Paul of the Cross had reached the transforming union when he was about thirty-one years of age, he had to continue his life on earth until he was eighty-one and found the Order of the Passionists, who devoted themselves to the vocation of reparation. So for forty-five years their saintly founder underwent unheard of sufferings not for his own purification but in order that he might become a model for the life of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, bk. II; Fr. Anthony of the Holy Spirit, O.D.C., *Directorium*, p. 52.

reparation. The citizens of Rome used to say: "from the way of Paul deliver us, Lord." But throughout his afflictions he kept his gentleness and loving kindness for everyone.

These reparative souls must be guided to a perfect conformity with Christ the victim.<sup>1</sup> They should often return to the contemplation of Christ's Passion, considering at the same time the heinous sins which tear individual souls and entire nations away from God and drag them down into paganism. In order to make reparation they should often unite the personal offering of all their daily crosses to the offering of Christ, which continues as the living centre of the sacrifice of the Mass. In this way they acquire an ever deepening and loftier conception of the sacrifice of the Mass. They must also have frequent recourse to Our Blessed Lady, our co-redemptrix, whose secret influence leads souls to an intimate union with Christ.

Generally speaking, reparative souls enjoy infused contemplation which proceeds from their living faith enlightened by the gifts; otherwise they would not persevere in a way of life which is so difficult and full of sorrow. But there are many occasions when these souls find it difficult to realize that they have this spiritual contemplation owing to long periods of both sensible and spiritual aridity. Eventually they bear a perfect resemblance to Christ crucified and are the means of saving many souls. It is this apostolate of suffering and prayer which is the hidden source of the fruitfulness of the apostolate of preaching and instructing—a fact well known to God and the angels.

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*The way to perfection*

St. Alphonsus gives the following general advice to souls striving for perfection.<sup>2</sup>

They must place all their trust in God and not in themselves; that is to say, they must not depend on themselves and their good resolutions but with complete confidence in God ask his help to overcome self and then co-operate by doing all that is within their power.

<sup>1</sup> An excellent book on this subject has been written by Fr. L. de Bretagne, *La vie réparatrice*, Paris, Librairie St. Paul, 3e éd., 1934.

<sup>2</sup> *Praxis confessarii*, n. 160, p. 275.

They must try to avoid even the slightest deliberate fault, since, in the words of St. Teresa, "the devil makes use of deeds of small importance to provide an opening for greater faults." "A single thread is sufficient to hold the soul fast to earth."

These souls must not be unduly upset after committing some fault, but should humble themselves immediately and turn to God by making a short act of contrition and renewing their determination, and thus be at peace.

Close friendships with persons of either sex are to be avoided, no matter how holy those persons may be.

Let them destroy in themselves all tendency to self-esteem and rejoice in humiliations, taking a spiritual pleasure in being despised and ridiculed.

They should always show prompt and willing obedience towards their superiors.

They must constantly attend to the presence of God and resolve to please God and love him courageously even in the midst of trials and to do his will in all things. Without this determination the soul cannot progress along the way of perfection, neither will it receive from God his special graces. As St. Teresa says: "Progress does not consist in the soul obtaining for itself a greater enjoyment of God but in doing his will."

They must have a great love of prayer and an ardent desire for the kingdom of Heaven which Christ merited for us by shedding his blood.

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So far as extraordinary graces are concerned—such as visions and private revelations—one should follow the rule laid down by St. Alphonsus, *Praxis confessarii*, n. 144, where he refers to the teaching of St. Teresa: "As a normal rule it is safer for the director to show that he sets no great store by these extraordinary phenomena. For although some of them are genuine many are not. In fact, the majority of them are illusions. And the more eagerly they are sought after, the more a person departs from the way of trust and humility which is the surer way marked out by God Himself." The spiritual director should give his penitent this prudent advice: pray to God for the type of "ecstasy" which is free from all deceit—namely, the complete withdrawal of your sense faculties from

all attachment to created things—and for the grace of self-denial, without which you will never become truly perfect.

He must not hesitate to humble those who are foolishly stubborn and proud and continually worrying other people to death. Such souls never receive special graces, whatever they may say to the contrary. They must simply be recalled to a salutary fear of God.

## CHAPTER SIX

## THE DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS

WHAT is the meaning of this word "spirit" in the present context? It signifies a special way of judging, loving, willing, or acting, a mental attitude or inclination—for instance, to prayer, to penance, or to contradiction. We speak of a person having a spirit of contradiction or even of insubordination.

In the spiritual life we have to distinguish between three kinds of spirits: the spirit of God, the spirit of the devil, and the spirit of human nature.

The spirit of God is an internal prompting or tendency of the soul to judge, love, will and act in a supernatural way. It incites the soul to avoid sin by mortifying the flesh and by practising humility, and to tend towards God by obedience, piety, faith, confidence, and charity both affective and effective. This divine spirit is, therefore, particularly evident in the promptings of the Holy Ghost which correspond to the seven gifts.

This spirit of God is at first latent in beginners and becomes more manifest in proficients and in the perfect, who are more docile to the Holy Ghost. Under the inspiration of God there results a wonderful harmony between the various virtues and gifts, and between the different vocations—contemplative, active, apostolic.

It is this variety of vocations which distinguishes the spirit of one religious order from that of another, and the order flourishes or declines in proportion to the fidelity or lack of fidelity to its fundamental spirit.

Opposed to the spirit of God is the spirit of human nature, which is characterized as an inclination to judge, will and act in an excessively human manner, following the lead of fallen nature which tends towards its own ease and advantage. It is a spirit of egoism, a spirit of individualism. Prudence, for example, is no longer treated as the virtue directing man's acts to moral perfection and rightly ordering all the other moral

virtues, but as the virtue needed for finding means of avoiding every inconvenience. Similarly, mediocrity takes the place of the happy medium of virtue.

This spirit of mediocrity steers a middle course between good and evil but it does so not through any love of virtue but for purely utilitarian reasons—in order to avoid the disadvantages resulting from the practice of vice. On the other hand, the happy medium of virtue represents the highest central point between two extreme vices; thus the virtue of courage is the golden mean between cowardice and rash daring. Furthermore, the degree of perfection implied by this mean will vary according to the growth of the virtues; so, for instance, it is higher for the infused virtue of temperance than for the corresponding acquired virtue.

This spirit of mediocrity also invades the sphere of the theological virtues by continually denying further possible development to full perfection, as if they were bound by their nature to be nothing more than average virtues, as though it were possible for man to err by excess in his belief or hope in God or in his love for God, just as a man might love his country to excess by placing it before God.

The spirit of human nature will always be found to result in tepidity and eventually in sloth, and the person who yields to its promptings commits numerous venial sins, which gradually become more and more deliberate until at last he falls into mortal sin. Sometimes it has a peculiar affectionate character revealing itself in sentimental attachments to creatures, in an emotional love for them which takes the place of that genuine love existing primarily in the will. And it is but a step from romantic sentiment to carnal prudence and stupidity, which give a man an earthbound vision of everything—even of divine things—so that he only regards their capacity to satisfy his senses or his pride. Cf. Summa, IIa IIae, q. 55, q. 46.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, there is the spirit of the devil which is the tendency to judge, will, and act under the perverse inspiration of Satan. It is especially evident in those who lead a life of vice, in their pride, impurity, and violent passions, but it also makes itself felt in others at the moment of temptation.

<sup>1</sup> See also the *Imitation of Christ*, bk. III, c. 54: "The Different Motions of Nature and of Grace."

In every soul one or other of these three spirits is predominant: the spirit of the devil in the wicked, the spirit of human nature in the lukewarm, the spirit of God in those who are beginning to dedicate themselves generously to the way of perfection, even though they may yet experience the influence of the spirit of nature from time to time and also of the devil.

Having explained the meaning of the word "spirit" we now turn to the word "discernment." The discernment of spirits signifies the power of judging correctly the spirit which is ordinarily predominant in some individual. This power may be either acquired or infused. If acquired, it consists in the correct application of the principles of moral theology under the guidance of acquired and infused prudence, and it is perfected to a greater or less degree by the inspiration of the gift of counsel.

If the power is infused, then it is the apostolic grace conferred primarily for the sanctification of others, which is mentioned by St. Paul: "another can test the spirit of the prophets" (1 Cor. xii, 10). This is a rare gift. But at the same time the good director who is devout, virtuous, and prudent is continually receiving special graces proper to his state which, since they are intended for helping those under the priest's care, are to some extent on a par with the apostolic grace; they perfect both his prudence and the inspirations of the gift of counsel.

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What is the fundamental principle to be observed in the discerning of spirits? It is the one laid down by Christ himself: "it is by their fruit that you will know them", because "any sound tree will bear good fruit, while any tree that is withered will bear fruit that is worthless; that worthless fruit should come from a sound tree, or good fruit from a withered tree, is impossible" (Matt. vii, 17, 18, 20).

The good fruit which should result from the spiritual life are the virtues, the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and actions corresponding to the virtues and gifts. Therefore the discernment of spirits must be based on the principal virtues—which are, in ascending order of perfection: chastity and mortification; humble obedience; faith, hope, and charity. We will now apply this principle to the three kinds of spirits.

### *Signs of the spirit of human nature*

It would be comparatively easy to describe the signs of this spirit by opposing it to the spirit of God, noting at the same time certain differences from the spirit of the devil. As we have said already, this spirit of human nature is the inclination to judge, will, and act in a merely natural way. But notice the meaning of the word "natural." It is not intended to refer to human nature in its essential condition as capable of elevation to the supernatural order, but either to fallen nature not yet revivified by grace or to regenerate human nature, which still bears the four wounds left by original sin and now further aggravated by personal sin. These wounds, although scarring, will never be completely healed in this life.<sup>1</sup>

They are wounds inherited by the entire human race from the sin of its first parents and only imperfectly healed by the water of Baptism, since this sacrament does not destroy concupiscence. This is very beneficial to our spiritual training, for we can thus acquire merit in overcoming our inordinate desires with the aid of God's grace. There is also another advantage to be gained from this imperfect healing; men might otherwise receive Baptism merely to avoid the penalties of this life and not because of the glory of eternal life. We are Christ's heirs, "only we must share his sufferings, if we are to share his glory" (Rom. viii, 17). Cf. St. Thomas, IIIa, q. 69, a. 3. But these four wounds are further aggravated by our own personal sins which diminish our natural inclination to virtue by putting a strong obstacle in its way—a tendency to evil. "By sin (even by venial sin in those baptized) man's reason becomes obscured—especially in directing what is to be done—and the will is hardened against good; the difficulty of acting well is increased, and more fuel is added to the fire of concupiscence" (Ia IIae, q. 85, a. 3).

Therefore the spirit of fallen or wounded nature is a bias

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ia IIae, q. 85, a. 3.

The wounds of nature  
 in the intellect deprived of its ordering to truth, the wound of ignorance in the place of prudence.  
 in the will deprived of its ordering to good, the wound of malice in the place of justice.  
 in the irascible appetite deprived of its correct attitude towards difficulty, the wound of weakness in the place of fortitude.  
 in the concupiscent appetite deprived of its ordering to pleasure moderated by reason, the wound of concupiscence in the place of temperance.

towards the concupiscence still present within us, inclining us to sin and thus to sloth and cowardice in our irascible appetite, malice in our will, negligence, imprudence or deceit in the intellect. In a word, it is a spirit of self-satisfaction, inordinate love of self, egoism. And this spirit of self-love, as St. Thomas has shown, dedicates a man to the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life.<sup>1</sup>

This triple concupiscence is in its turn a dangerous slope towards the seven capital sins—vain glory, envy, anger, avarice, sloth, gluttony, lust—which are able to call even more grievous sins into being (*Ia IIae*, q. 84, a. 4). According to St. John of the Cross (*Dark Night of the Soul*, bk. I, cc. 2–7) these capital sins may also appear in the spiritual order; for instance, spiritual gluttony which is an excessive desire for spiritual consolation loved for its own sake and not for the sake of God, and also spiritual pride. But these sins are not the most evil fruit of the spirit of nature; they prepare the way for even more serious sins, such as unbelief, despair, hatred of God.

When considered in this way the wounded nature described by St. Thomas does not differ from the nature portrayed in the *Imitation of Christ* (bk. III, c. 54).

But now let us study the spirit of human nature in its relation to the principal virtues of mortification, humility, faith, hope, and charity. As soon as we apply the first rule for the discernment of spirits—"it is by their fruit that you will know them"—we find that this natural spirit is never inclined to exterior or interior mortification, neither is it prepared to accept humiliations. As the masters of the spiritual life have always pointed out, nature is not anxious to be put to death and even in the life of prayer she is a spiritual glutton for consolation, which is totally opposed to the spirit of faith and true love of God.

A soul which is influenced by this spirit will cease to make further progress and abandon the spiritual life, once it has encountered its first difficulties or period of aridity. It hides its inattention to the interior life under the cloak of an energetic apostolate, devoting all its energy to external activity which has ceased to be supernatural and become entirely superficial. Such a person is confusing charity with philanthropy, humanism, and liberalism. Gradually this natural

<sup>1</sup> *Ia IIae*, q. 77, a. 4 and 5; cf. Bossuet, *Traité de la Concupiscence*.

activity loses its initial drive; it begins as a burst of energy, changes into a general hurry, and finally, slows down to a leisurely pace.

Human nature begins to groan as soon as it has to face contradiction or trial, since it is far from willing to shoulder the cross. And thus by degrees it sinks into despair. Its initial fervour was no stronger than the flame which leaps from a bundle of straw only to die away again as quickly as it appeared.

This spirit of nature reveals itself as completely egoistic with no regard for the glory of God or the saving of souls. No longer the love of God and one's neighbour but a disordered love of self occupies pride of place in the soul.

But this spirit is quick in trying to justify itself by appealing to a theory which takes as its fundamental principle: moderation in all things. We must avoid excess in our self-denial and spiritual exercises. We are not obliged to strive for mystical perfection, that would be the error of Mysticism. In fact, if a person makes it his daily practice to read a chapter from the *Imitation of Christ* for his spiritual profit, he is already a mystic. We must do nothing more than follow the ordinary way: *virtus stat in medio*.

See how such people misinterpret that principle for their own ends. Its true meaning is that a moral virtue is the happy medium between two vices, the one erring by excess, the other by defect, just as fortitude is the mean between cowardice and rash daring. Now this mean is obviously the highest possible point between and above the two opposing vices. On the other hand, the mean advocated by the spirit of nature is that of mediocrity, not the mean which lies between and soars above two vices but the unsettled mean between vice and virtue, between good and evil, having more in common with evil than with good, and which lies below the half-way mark—as in the following scale of examination marks: excellent, good, satisfactory, moderate, bad, very bad. The theory used by the spirit of nature in an attempt to justify its outlook is the theory of mediocrity under a veneer of virtue, since it avoids opposing vices not through any great love for moral good but because of the inconveniences which would ensue to its comfort and advantage. That was the underlying principle of the utilitarian outlook adopted by Epicurus and Horace. Hence we speak of

a mediocre wine which is neither good nor bad, mediocre work, a spirit of mediocrity.

Furthermore, this theory invoked by human nature does not admit—at least in practice—that the theological virtues are of their very nature without measure, that there is no excess or defect in faith, hope, and charity. It rejects the teaching of St. Thomas: “we cannot love God as much as he deserves to be loved, neither can we believe or hope in him as much as we should” (Ia IIae, q. 64, a. 4).

It goes without saying that this theory will also deny in practice the need of docility to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost for which a man is disposed by the seven gifts.

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In the letter of Fr. de Paredes, General of the Order of Preachers in the year 1926, which is to be found at the beginning of the new edition of the *Constitutions*, the following description is given of the spirit of human nature (p. 20): “Although a man’s holiness is the result of God’s grace working in his soul, it presupposes on our part a long and difficult process of purification and transformation of everything within us, until we have destroyed completely the old self which is corrupted by the desires of the flesh and put on the new self ‘which is created in God’s image, justified and sanctified through the truth.’ Hence the need for the spirit of obedience, self-denial, and sacrifice with which we must all observe these rules perseveringly and to the letter . . .”

In contrast: “Any human relaxation, any spirit of faint-heartedness, any concession made on these matters to human considerations, any unlawful dispensation which is not based on the Constitutions, may all be considered as a deviation from duty on the part of superiors . . . and, on the part of his subjects, as a disowning of their obligation to sanctify themselves and make themselves fit instruments for carrying out their sacred ministry. Such surrender to slothfulness would make it clear that our motive in entering the religious state was not to pursue the ideal set before us by God and the Church but simply to solve the problem of life here on earth with the minimum of trouble, so that in the religious state we might be more certain of receiving all the necessities of life and the more easily

provide for ourselves comforts which we might not have enjoyed in the world.

“In order that all our regular duties should be the means of making us holy, as the Constitutions intend, it is not sufficient to observe merely the visible part of those duties as though one were only anxious to avoid the punishment contained in the law itself or imposed by the Superior, or as though one’s sole object was to appear before Superiors as being beyond reproach. If our rules are to prove suitable means of sanctification . . . (and of preparation for the sacred ministry) they must proceed from a supernatural origin; in other words, they must have their source in the grace of God which will give them a supernatural character.

“Without this interior spirit, which is the centre and source of that supernatural life . . . , everything in us becomes completely material and mechanical and lacks the driving force of life, ‘no better than echoing bronze or the clash of cymbals’; our private devotion is weakened and deprived of all merit, and our community life is robbed of its true purpose and efficacy. We work, we may even take a great deal of trouble over our various tasks, but this activity is not a sign of the genuine interior life of faith, hope, and charity. . . . It is little more than an effort called forth by some external need of activity or in obedience to merely human motives which, since they accord with our natural inclinations, attract us consciously or unconsciously. As a result of this lack of an interior spirit which would give us victory over ourselves and—in our ministry—victory over the enemies opposed to our salvation of souls, how much time is frittered away to no purpose! Look at the futility of so much effort and sacrifice! How much activity is simply wasted!”

On the other hand, when this interior spirit is allowed to grow and develop it produces fruits of real sanctity. We become all the more clearly aware of the value and excellence of our religious vocation.

“This interior spirit is formed in us by the practice of the means of perfection suggested by ascetical theology, but it is firmly established and perfected by spiritual growth in the different stages of the mystical life, as is well explained by St. Thomas. The mystical life is the completion of the ascetical life,

the peak of the soul's ascent through the various stages of Christian perfection. There have been periods when this teaching was regarded with suspicion, when practical errors in this respect stunted the growth of the spirit of genuine piety; but now we can be grateful for the return to traditional teaching, which has re-opened the way for souls athirst for the supernatural life to come to a knowledge of mystical realities. And in this life of perfection the spirit of God is most certainly present revivifying the soul.<sup>1</sup>

Obvious examples of the influence of the spirit of nature are tepidity in the celebration of Holy Mass, haste in the saying of one's Office—almost like a machine—, curiosity and eventually sloth in the pursuit of one's studies, carelessness in observing the rule of silence and other practical rules, restrictions attached to the extent of one's obedience, cringing obedience out of love for the human superior and not for God or with a view to the obtaining of new honours and dignities.

We have already noted in common with other authors the different ways in which a priest may celebrate Mass. Sometimes it is celebrated worthily in a spirit of faith and with true devotion, obvious signs of the influence of the spirit of God. On other occasions it is read rather than celebrated with the greatest care after the manner of an official carrying out his regular duties, just as civil authorities perform their duties according to strict rule. Or else it is hurried over in twenty minutes or even less, with no devotion and sometimes to the scandal of the faithful. These latter ways of offering the sacrifice of the Mass bear evident witness to the presence of the spirit of nature. It is important that this be pointed out to priests during their retreat.

In order to guard against this natural spirit in the Mass all priests are urged to celebrate Mass daily: in the first place, because of the sacrifice itself which is offered to God as an act of worship, supplication, reparation, and thanksgiving for the many graces received each day; secondly, because of the sacramental Communion in which we receive our daily nourishment; thirdly, because of the rich benefits which accrue to the whole Church, to all the faithful both living and dead.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *The Imitation of Christ*, bk. IV, c. 5: "Of the Dignity of the Sacrament and of the Priestly State."

Moreover, if the priest offers Mass only infrequently, he is failing in his duty and is burying his talent in the ground. Nevertheless, the priest who celebrates daily must be careful to make a suitable preparation.

When there is any doubt whether an individual is under the general influence of a good or evil spirit the spiritual director should examine carefully the soul's humility, its spirit of mortification, and its obedience to the director; and he himself must pray to God for guidance.

#### *Signs of the evil spirit*

In contrast to the spirit of God the spirit of the devil at first lifts the soul to the heights of pride and then plunges it down into turmoil and despair, just as the devil himself sinned through pride and is now condemned to an eternity of despair and hatred of God.

In order to recognize this evil spirit we must first observe its effect on mortification, humility, and obedience, and then its effect on the theological virtues.

The spirit of the devil does not always deter a soul from *mortification*; in this respect it differs from the spirit of nature. On the contrary, it often urges the soul to go to extremes in the practice of *exterior* mortification which everyone can see, which results in spiritual pride and injury to the individual's health. Such a spirit has no time for the interior mortification of the imagination, heart, and one's own will and judgment, although it pretends to be concerned about it by making the soul scrupulous over details but careless in matters of greater importance; for example, in the principal duties of one's state of life. It prompts the soul to hypocrisy: "I fast twice in the week" (Luke xviii, 12).

*Humility* is never encouraged by this spirit, for it gradually distorts the soul's vision to see itself as greater than it really is, greater than anyone else. Almost unconsciously it makes the prayer of the Pharisee its own: "I thank thee, God, that I am not like the rest of men . . . or like this publican here" (Luke xviii, 11). This spiritual pride goes hand in hand with a false humility, which accuses itself of some evil so as to avoid being accused by others of even greater faults and in order to make them think that we are truly humble. Sometimes the evil spirit

leads us to confuse humility with faint-heartedness, which is the daughter of pride and fears to run the risk of contempt. The evil spirit is also an enemy of *obedience*, prompting us either to open disobedience or to servility according to circumstances.

As regards the virtue of *faith* the spirit of the devil distracts our attention from the truths of the Gospel which are simpler and yet more profound—such as those contained in the Our Father which we ought always to say with special care and devotion, or those portrayed in the mysteries of the Rosary—and encourages us to focus our mind on what is extraordinary. Remember his tempting of Christ: “If thou art the Son of God, cast thyself down to earth; for it is written, He has given charge to his angels concerning thee, and they will hold thee up with their hands, lest thou shouldst chance to trip on a stone. Jesus said to him, But it is further written, Thou shalt not put the Lord Thy God to the proof” (Matt. iv, 6-7).

With a similar intent the devil frequently suggests desires contrary to our vocation: so, for instance, he urges the Carthusian to set out to convert the pagan world, and the missionary to adopt the solitary life of the Carthusian. In our prayer he prompts us to ignore the spirit of the Liturgy, to pray on Good Friday as though it were Christmas Day, or vice versa. He is also a past master in the art of giving men an attraction for doctrinal novelties—one has only to think of the period of modernism—or for reading books written by Liberal Protestants on the pretext of aligning our faith to the needs of the times. But should our natural bent be in the opposite direction he will then encourage us to be so tenacious of archaic traditions that we become a centre of fierce disagreement, even in our own Catholic circles. It is easy to detect his influence behind the desire of the Jews recently converted to Christianity to return to the observance of the Mosaic law, and St. Paul wrote his Epistle to the Hebrews in an endeavour to warn them against such a temptation: “Strengthen your own resolution, to make sure that none of you grows hardened; sin has such power to cheat us” (iii, 13). Corruption of dogma is also the work of the devil—for instance, the Calvinist interpretation of the doctrine of predestination. The devil is only too well acquainted with the principle—*corruptio optimi pessima*—and so he strives unceasingly to pervert a man’s faith. He realizes that there is

nothing worse, nothing more dangerous, nothing more worthy of condemnation than a false brand of Christianity which nevertheless retains a faint resemblance to the truth. That is why he sometimes disguises himself as Christ before revealing himself in his true character as the arch-enemy of Christ. And there we have the reason for the greater danger inherent in the Protestantism of Luther and Calvin—but not of those Protestants who are in good faith—than in any spirit of naturalism, since it is far more deceptive, and while admitting the truth of Scripture makes use of it for its own evil purpose.

Naturalism, whether in its original practical form or in its later theoretical form, may often be attributed to the spirit of fallen nature. The same cannot be said of the malicious travesty of supernatural truth such as we find in Calvinism. No one but the devil is responsible for this. Such falsification of divine faith must be likened to the act of picking up the sword to slay oneself and one’s own brothers—an act of suicide and fratricide. This would seem to be the explanation of the spirit underlying the history of the so-called Reformation, although we must not forget that many Protestants are in perfectly good faith since they are unaware of the true spirit of Protestantism.

As regards the virtue of *hope* the evil spirit strives with all the forces at his command to turn our hope into presumption. It is easy to find an example of this in the desire of some people to find a quicker route to holiness than that provided by the normal development of the spiritual life through the various stages, and who wish to avoid the way of humility and self-conquest in their effort for perfection. He is also quick to make us annoyed with ourselves when we realize clearly our many imperfections, and then sorrow gives way to anger—the off-spring of pride and an effective barrier to sorrow. Presumption in its turn leads to despair, when a man recognizes the inadequacy of his own efforts for attaining the end he desires. He looks upon difficult good as something quite beyond his reach and thus he despairs.

As regards the virtue of *charity* the evil spirit tries to foster other qualities which bear a misleading resemblance to that virtue. Adapting his tactics to our varied and conflicting natural inclinations he encourages in some a false charity of sentimentality, humanitarianism, liberalism, which cloaks its

excessive leniency under a guise of mercy and generosity; in others he nourishes a zeal for souls which is forever discovering faults in other people but never in themselves, always seeing the speck of dust in their brother's eye but never the beam in their own (cf. Matt. vii, 3).

And what results from all this? Discord and the destruction of peace. The man who is influenced by this spirit chafes at every contradiction. So absorbed has he become with his own self that he practically denies the existence of anybody else and unconsciously exalts himself above all his neighbours, like a statue on a pedestal.

If such a man commits a serious sin which he finds it impossible to hide from others, he is upset, angry, desperate. Eventually his mind is darkened and his heart hardened. But notice the cunning of Satan. Before the sin he carefully hides its dangerous consequences and urges his "victim" to be broad-minded; after the sin he troubles the man's conscience with thoughts of God's relentless justice, so as to drag him down into the depths of despair. And thus he forms souls after his own likeness—despair following on pride.

Consequently, if anyone is granted sense consolations in prayer but comes away with increased self-love, higher in his own estimation than those around him, with less obedience towards his superiors and less simplicity in accepting the advice of his spiritual guide, that is a certain indication of the presence of the evil spirit in his sense devotion. The absence of humility, obedience, and brotherly love is always a sign of the absence of the spirit of God.

#### *Signs of the spirit of God*

These signs are in direct contrast to those of the spirits of nature and of the devil. The spirit of God certainly prompts us to exterior mortification—and in this respect it differs from the spirit of nature—but this mortification is always controlled by Christian prudence and obedience; never does it draw attention to oneself nor is it allowed to endanger health. Furthermore, the spirit of God teaches us that this form of mortification is of little value unless accompanied by a corresponding mortification of the imagination, memory—forgetting injuries we have suffered—, heart, will, and judgment. We can see at

once the vast difference between the spirit of God and that of the devil. In addition, the spirit of God fosters in us *true humility* which paves the way for *perfect obedience*, prevents us from preferring ourselves to others, does not shrink from being despised, does not parade our talents while not denying their existence but using them as means of giving glory to God.

The spirit of God *nourishes our faith* on the simpler and more profound truths of the Gospel, such as those contained in the Our Father. It keeps us faithful to tradition and strangers to novelty. This genuine supernatural faith helps us to see God in our superiors, and thus our spirit of faith is perfected since we come to judge everything in the light of this virtue.

The spirit of God *strengthens our hope* by preserving it from presumption; for instance, it prompts us to yearn for the life-giving well of prayer but to draw near to it along the road of humility, self-denial and the cross. Hence this spirit gives us a holy indifference towards earthly success.

The spirit of God *increases the fervour of our charity*. It confers on us a zeal for the glory of God and the saving of souls, and a complete forgetfulness of self, so that we always think of God in the first place and only secondarily of our own convenience. It teaches us an effective love for our neighbour, making us realize that this is the principal sign of our love of God. It prevents rash judgment and the taking of scandal without just cause. While prompting us to zeal it ensures that it is a zeal moderated by patience, meekness, and prudence, which edifies by prayer and good example and does not cause annoyance by inopportune correction. The spirit of God provides the soul with unlimited patience in the midst of adversity, a love of the cross, and a love of one's enemies. But its crowning glory is peace—peace with God, with others, with ourselves—and this is often accompanied by a deep interior joy.

On occasions when there is an accidental lapse in our service of God, the divine spirit reminds us of his mercy.

"The spirit yields a harvest of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, forbearance, gentleness, faith, courtesy, temperateness, purity" (Gal. v, 23), together with humility and obedience.

Those are the general signs of God's spirit, but it is not always easy to recognize its presence or its absence in any

individual act. However, if a person oppressed by sorrow prays and is deeply consoled, this is a sign that God is visiting that soul—provided that the consolation results in humble obedience and brotherly love.

But it is most important to distinguish carefully between the first moment of the soul's comforting and the period which follows, when the soul may rely on its own judgment about the nature of this consolation and thus be blinded by self-love.

It would be presumptuous on our part to crave for extraordinary graces, such as revelations or interior conversations. But a soul which lives and perseveres in humility, self-denial, and almost continual recollection often receives in accordance with the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost special inspirations which result in a wonderful blending of simplicity and prudence, humility and zeal, firmness and gentleness. This harmony and blending of the virtues is a sure sign of the presence of God's spirit.

Those who do receive extraordinary graces from God must be prepared to carry the cross, to maintain complete silence and secrecy, and to speak about their favours to no one other than their spiritual director. Otherwise they stand in grave peril of spiritual pride.

There is a special danger in revelations which seem to refer to future events or to questions of doctrine, since they so easily give rise to deception. Even if the original inspiration were from God, the individual could later on superimpose his own interpretation which may be to a greater or less extent erroneous and is usually too material. In conclusion, it cannot be stressed too often that ecstasies and revelations which do not result in a more perfect way of life and do not make the subject less sure of himself cannot be attributed to the spirit of God—especially if they promote discord, and interfere with the fulfilment of the duties attached to one's state of life.

Therefore the signs of God's spirit are humble obedience, brotherly love, peace, spiritual joy which radiates itself to all around.

#### *Secondary principles for the discernment of spirits*

Generally speaking, *acts which a man is suddenly called upon to perform* are a good guide to the nature of the spirit in that

individual, whereas we must be careful in drawing conclusions from acts that are the result of mature deliberation. But we should exclude from this rule all indeliberate movements of the will and all sins of frailty; it is intended to refer only to acts which are sufficiently deliberate and grave, which even a hypocrite would find it impossible to disguise. Remember how the spirit of the Pharisees was revealed after the unexpected healing of the man blind from birth.

*Suffering* is also a trustworthy guide to the secrets of a man's heart. That is why false friends never stand the test of adversity (cf. Eccles. vi, 8). Suffering is the furnace, so to speak, in which God puts his chosen ones to the test: "Pottery is tested in the furnace, man in the crucible of suffering" (Eccles. xxvii, 6). "God, all the while, did but test them, and testing them found them worthy of him. His gold, tried in the crucible, his burnt-sacrifice, graciously accepted, they do but wait for the time of deliverance; then they will shine out, these just souls, unconquerable as the sparks that break out, now here, now there, among the stubble. Theirs to sit in judgment on nations, to subdue whole peoples, under a Lord whose reign shall last for ever" (Wisdom iii, 5-8). But for this suffering was necessary—"a hundred trials beset the innocent" (Psalm xxxiii, 21)—in order to prove their forbearance, humility, gentleness, and perseverance to the end.

Finally, *authority* reveals a man for what he is, because in receiving any honour or authority he is called upon to direct and govern other people—a task which is far more difficult, extensive, and public than anything which he did before in his private life. Now he has to show wisdom and prudence without the mediocrity of the opportunist or utilitarian, charity for all, justice, fearless courage in correcting evil-doers, kindness in helping his faithful subjects. Cf. the Dialogue of St. Catherine of Sienna where she speaks of the difference between good and bad rulers.

#### *Rules for various occasions*

During periods when the soul finds no consolation in the things of God our rule of life should not be altered in any way; we must remain firm and constant in observing the resolutions already made in the presence of God. This is more than ever

necessary when the trial proves so oppressive that the devil is able to tempt us to become depressed.

At the same time even more attention must be given to prayer, penance, and our examination of conscience. Why? Because spiritual desolation is apt to make us slothful in those three spiritual duties, and this can only be avoided by using a suitable antidote. Aridity—no matter what its cause may be—should be treated as an opportunity of a virtuous reaction, a renewal of our readiness to serve God. Cf. *The Imitation of Christ*, bk. I, c. 12: of the advantage of adversity; "It is good for us now and then to have some troubles and adversities; for oftentimes they make a man enter into himself, that he may know that he is an exile, and place not his hopes in anything of the world." And thus our sadness will gradually lose its evil character and become—through prayer—a joyful sorrow.

The evil spirit is adept in deceiving us by hiding his evil intent under the guise of good; once he has won us over he leads us into sin. This is seduction in its worst form. Sometimes the devil goes so far as to disguise himself as an angel of light; he lets us think that we are acting for the good of someone committed to our care when, in fact, he is leading us away from the path to God by making us more desirous of our own convenience than of holiness. Thus he promotes strife and dissunity, and disrupts peace.

Then again, if anyone finds himself upset when despised by others, this is a sign of at least an imperfect spirit—if not of an evil spirit—especially in those who are reputed to have been singularly favoured by God, because such people rejoice not only in their gifts and favours but also in their trials and humiliations: "I will not boast about myself, except to tell you of my humiliations . . . so that the strength of Christ may enshrine itself in me. I am well content with those humiliations of mine, with the insults, the hardships, the persecutions, the times of difficulty I undergo for Christ" (2 Cor. xii, 4, 9–10). St. Augustine says that whereas the philosopher looks on contempt as a disgrace the Apostle regards it as his greatest treasure (*Sermo* 160).

Therefore the spirit which chafes under humiliation is not a perfect spirit: neither is the spirit which neglects to deny itself

a spirit of solid virtue, since all the virtues ought to develop in unison as they are so closely related to each other.

It follows, therefore, that a spirit which prompts a man to numerous acts of mortification but not to ready obedience is imperfect, and must be regarded—at least to some extent—as having an evil intention, since it is so insistent on following its own will. True it is that such a spirit is often the cause of many good works but these are not inspired by any love of God, as is evident from the lack of growth in humble obedience—the sure sign of loving conformity to the will of God.

Neither is that spirit to be trusted which is always urging man to paradoxical action, which is continually forming judgments that conflict with the common opinion of prudent men. Such a spirit is, so to speak, exotic and artificial; it is impulsive rather than virtuous.

Similarly, there cannot be any doubt about the evil nature of a spirit which fosters in man a desire for what is extraordinary and willingly speaks of this to all and sundry. God would never lead a soul to the higher planes of the spiritual life without making it at the same time extremely humble, since all the virtues are inter-related and so are perfected together. That is why it is so easy to distinguish the truly high-minded person from one who is presumptuous. It is part of the devil's plan to incite in man a desire for what is new, curious, abnormal, amazing, unusual, and so to excite the wonder and admiration of others that they will think of him as a saint.

The same holds true of a person not yet firmly grounded in the virtues of humility and obedience, who while professing a desire to imitate the saints, concentrates on details of their lives which were never intended to be imitated but simply admired, and dedicates himself to a life of extraordinary forms of prayer and penance.

How foolish to commence erecting a spiritual mansion from the top, like a bird trying to fly without wings! We should never be misled by the apparent success of a soul which makes such an attempt; its flight into the realms of mysticism is deceptive, dangerous, and to no purpose.

*Conclusion.* It follows, therefore, from the principles outlined in this chapter that the two principal signs of the divine spirit are humble obedience and brotherly love, which redirects our

affection away from self to our neighbour and through him to God. Humble obedience is never a characteristic either of the spirit of nature, which has no inclination for such a virtue, or of the evil spirit—the spirit of pride and disobedience. On the other hand, humble obedience even in small matters bears witness to an increasing conformity to the will of God.

Brotherly love, however, is an even greater proof of progress in the love of God: "The mark by which all men will know you for my disciples will be the love which you bear one another" (John xiii, 35). We might call it the "thermometer" of our union with God, since even our senses are bound to recognize the love that inspires the help we give our neighbour, especially when he is difficult and exacting. But if in spite of that difficulty we persevere in our love for him, this surely is a sign that the motive of our help is none other than God himself and that our love for God is increasing, since charity is an undivided infused virtue with God as its primary object and our neighbour as its secondary object. Consequently, this visible love of our neighbour is proof of our invisible love of God—provided it is not mere sentimentality.

And thus, if humble obedience and brotherly love are being preserved and developed in any individual or community, that is proof overwhelming of growth in genuine love of God. He himself will remedy in such souls any deficiency in natural intelligence or physical strength by inspirations, for which they are prepared by the gifts of counsel and of fortitude.

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#### *Final conclusion*

The truths we have discussed in considering the discernment of spirits serve only to stress still further the central theme of this book: every priest has an obligation in virtue of his ordination and the purpose of that ordination—namely, an increasingly holy celebration of the sacrifice of the Mass and the sanctification of souls—to strive daily for an intimate union with Christ the priest and victim, in imitation of those priests who have been canonized.

Futhermore, every priest must labour as another Christ, in union with Christ, in his ministry of preaching the word of God, hearing confessions and directing souls at every stage of

their spiritual life. Only in this way will he reveal in his own person the sublime dignity of the priesthood and its power for unlimited good. And thus the priest will be sincere and effective in his effort to save souls, and in a world which is returning to the natural outlook of paganism and utilitarianism he will reap a rich harvest in preaching the Gospel, so that souls who have to be saved "may have life, and have it more abundantly."

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- Mgr. Ancel. *La pauvreté du prêtre d'après la vie et les écrits du V. Père Chevrier*, Lyon-Paris, 1945.
- Mgr. A. Bernareggi. *Responsabilità del sacerdote nell'ora attuale*, Rome, 1945.
- Carpentier, S. J. *La spiritualité du clergé diocésain*: *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, vol. 68, 1946, p. 192-277.
- Abbé Grimand. *La vie spirituelle du prêtre séculier*, Paris, 1946.
- Mgr. Guerry. *Le clergé diocésain en face de sa mission actuelle d'évangélisation*, Rapport présenté à la Réunion des Cardinaux et Archevêques de France, 1944.
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- M. J. Nicolas, O.P. *Sacerdoce diocésain et vie religieuse*: *Revue Thomiste*, March, 1946.

- Mgr. Richaud. *Y a-t-il une spiritualité du Clergé diocésain?* Paris, 1945.
- Canon F. X. Maquart. *Allons-nous vers une spiritualité nouvelle?* Preface written by M. B. Lavaud, O.P. Rheims, 1948.

This last-named work is a commentary on those famous words of His Holiness Pius XII: "to the Missionaries of the great return": "It would be a serious mistake to rely *primarily* on so-called modern methods and ingenuity, and then to avail oneself of the spiritual strength of grace through prayer and penance only as a *subsidiary help*."

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